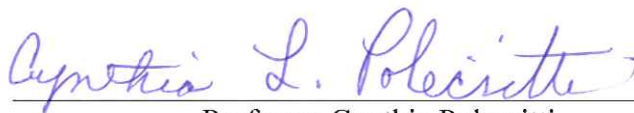


**Shedding Light on a Dark Age: Britain in the Fourth and Fifth
Centuries**

Ian Hickey

University of California, Santa Cruz
Department of History

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Professor Cynthia Polecristi



Professor Charles Hedrick

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This paper seeks to examine the fourth and fifth centuries in Britain in order to address the issue of collapse versus continuity after the end of the Roman state. By discussing the fourth and fifth centuries in depth, trends in political and economic structures as well as cultural identities will be examined with the aim of presenting as accurate a picture as possible of an often misunderstood historical period. Specifically, several persistent myths of the late and post-Roman period in Britain will be addressed and refuted, and the diversity of experience during the era addressed in full. The result is a nuanced portrait of a land and a people undergoing dramatic social transformations during one of the most formative eras in Western history.

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Myth and Misconception

The fourth and fifth centuries are often the most poorly understood in British history, and their study is bound up with myth, legend and stereotype. That Roman civilization came to an abrupt and calamitous end in Britain is often taken as a given even by serious scholars, and it is easy to see why. Unlike the situation in the Roman provinces on the continent, urban life in Britain did not survive from the Roman period into the Middle Ages. Villas did not remain in use, the money and taxation system collapsed, and both the Latin language and the indigenous Brythonic dialects were subsumed by the Germanic tongues that would one day coalesce into English. Finally, Christianity is commonly believed to have died out in Britain following the end of the Roman Empire, replaced by barbarous Germanic paganism. These dramatic changes are often thought to be the result of a dramatic collapse of Roman civilization in the face of overwhelming barbarian invasions in the fifth century, which swept away the decadent and decaying world of Roman Britain and replaced it with a vigorous Germanic warrior society.

This picture is largely inaccurate, though there are some truths to it. That English replaced the Latin and Celtic languages in Britain is true enough, as is the fact that most of Britain in the early medieval era shared a distinctly “Germanic” culture.¹ The supposition however that Germanic culture annihilated all of what was Roman in Britain in the fifth century is demonstrably false, as is the notion that Roman culture and society in Britain in the fourth century was somehow diseased, decadent or otherwise doomed to fall. As a reaction to these long held opinions, certain scholars² have posited that few fundamental changes occurred at all in Britain in the immediate post-Roman period, arguing for substantial continuity of culture, settlement and economic and urban activity. This scenario however depends upon both the strength of the underlying Celtic culture of the Romano-

British in the late fourth century as well as upon the political and economic viability of the post-Roman polities for its feasibility. Only by examining a broad range of evidence can the question of collapse versus continuity be fully analyzed, and an accurate portrait of Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries be painted which relies upon neither myth nor supposition for its completion.

Emerging into History: Britain 200 BCE-84 CE

In order to assess the strength of Celtic culture in Britain after the Roman period, it is necessary to examine the nature of Celtic society prior to the coming of the Roman Empire. It was long thought that the British countryside in the Late Iron Age (200 BCE-43 CE³) the Roman conquest was largely a wild and untamed place, with small areas of human settlement separated by vast regions of forest and marshland. As romantic as this image may be, current evidence derived from both palynology (analysis of ancient pollen deposits) and aerial photography, which can detect patterns in the landscape too subtle to be seen at ground level, suggests that the pre-Roman landscape was far more intensively farmed than was previously believed. By the Late Iron Age, the countryside of what would one day become Roman Britain was largely rural rather than wild, with the majority of the great forests having been broken up by the Late Bronze Age (circa 1000-800 BCE)⁴. Although some significant areas of dense woodland still remained, particularly in the Somerset Levels, the Midlands and the Weald, even these would have been managed to some degree and exploited for timber, fuel, rough grazing and hunting.⁵

This pattern of extensive forest clearance is indicative of a population which needed to thoroughly utilize its environment. In the south and east of Britain large scale, intensive grain production was well-established by the second century BCE, with the

cultivation of bread and spelt wheat, barley, oats and rye evident in a wide variety of environmental zones. Although mixed cereal was present in the north and west of Britain as well, pastoralism remained the dominant form of agriculture, particularly in the highland zones of the Welsh and Pennine mountains. By the Late Iron Age the British landscape, far from being a primeval wilderness, was largely made up of a mosaic of crop systems, open pastureland and small woods, with tracts of denser forest here and there.⁶

The expansion of agriculture in the Late Iron Age suggests a significant increase in population. Prior to the advancements in the study of ancient landscapes in the mid-to-late twentieth century, it was believed that the population of Iron Age Britain was quite small, with estimates of as little as 500,000 people for the whole of Great Britain.⁷ Given current knowledge about the degree of landscape exploitation, these figures are now considered far too low. Modern estimates place the population of what would later become Roman Britain (i.e. England and Wales) at between 1.5⁸ and 3 million⁹ people at the time of the Roman conquest. For the purposes of this paper, I will adopt a figure of 2 million, with the majority of this population concentrated in the fertile lands of the southeast.

In the Middle Iron Age the typical center of elite society in Britain was the hill-fort, which can be generally classified as a large, heavily defended settlement, complete with massive granaries and the beginnings of road systems. Found primarily in the southern heartlands of Britain, it is uncertain whether these hill-forts functioned primarily as elite residences, ritual sites, refuges or fortified grain storage facilities. However, what does seem evident is that these hill-forts, whatever their exact function, were extremely high-status sites within their societies. The heavily fortified nature of these sites, coupled with the significant and regular distances between individual hill-forts, suggests a society in which warfare was frequent and controlling and defending agricultural land was of

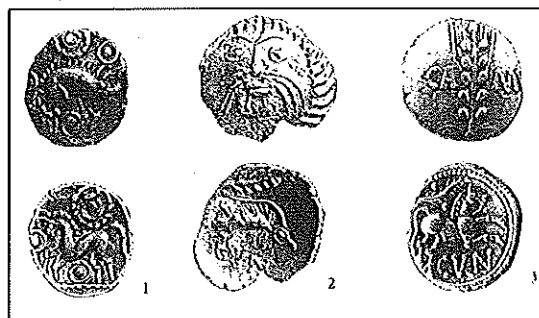
paramount importance, with each individual hill-fort functioning as a stronghold for the local people. These hill-forts were largely confined to southern England and the denser populations believed to have existed there. Populations in northern and western Britain and Wales were to remain typified by small, defended settlements until contact with the Roman world in the first century BCE.¹⁰

Starting in the second and third centuries BCE, however, these hill-forts were progressively abandoned and a new sort of power center emerged across the English countryside. This new sort of settlement, called an *oppidum* (plural *oppida*), is characterized as showing the beginnings of urban development. While not quite towns, *oppida* may be best described as “unusually intensive rural settlements”¹¹, areas containing relatively large populations with some defensive earthworks and centers of industry and craft production. It is telling that these *oppida* lack clear centers of authority or organization. That is to say, these are not nucleated, tightly organized settlements, but rather sprawling “polyfocal” settlements and economic centers. Unlike the tightly organized and heavily defended hill-forts, no single *oppidum* seems to have been a significant center of political power, which suggests that multiple *oppida* may have fallen under the control of a single political authority. This in turn suggests that political organizations were moving beyond the local and into the realm of regional powers. As with the hill-forts, the phenomenon of the *oppida* was largely confined to southern and eastern England, for reasons that will be explained below.¹²

One impetus, aside from growing population, for this concentration of political power was the growing might of the Roman Republic. From approximately 125 BCE on, when Rome annexed the Greek city of Massalia (modern-day Marseille) and its territories on the southern coast of France, Roman and Mediterranean culture made rapid inroads into

the society of the Gallic tribes of central and northern France. In addition to new luxury goods, increased trade with the Mediterranean world introduced new cultural models and ideals to Britain, including revolutionary ideas regarding the concentration and display of power. These new concepts of status and prestige were to have a profound effect upon Brythonic society in the first century BCE. One of the more significant developments was the appearance of coins in the societies of southern and eastern Britain, which revolutionized the local economies and may have influenced the development of the *oppida* previously mentioned. The first continental "Celtic" coins appear in Britain around 125 BCE, and new coins were being minted on British soil twenty-five years later. It is primarily by tracking finds of coins minted by different Brythonic peoples that archaeologists and historians have been

able to follow the development of localized Iron Age chiefdoms into larger political entities that can best be described as "proto-states".¹³



First century BCE coins. Pryor, 2004, pg. 422

By the mid-first century BCE the *oppida* of southern and eastern Britain had become centers not only of craft and industry, but also of coin production. These sites mark the development of increased specialization of production, show signs of the emergence of professional industries, and signify the incipient urbanization of southern Brythonic society.¹⁴ This intensification of trade and specialization of profession led to a marked increase in wealth in these societies, which in turn led to the rise for the first time of tribal nobility. While endemic warfare and a warrior class are evident in Brythonic culture from the Middle Iron Age on, by the first century BCE it is apparent that Brythonic society had become split between an agricultural

“peasant” majority and a warrior-aristocracy. This warrior elite dominated the new economies and politics of the southeast, and used its newfound purchasing power to acquire an exotic new array of trade goods and luxury items from the Mediterranean world. By showcasing their vast wealth, elite Britons were able to demonstrate their power “in terms of access to and control of imported cultural symbols”.¹⁵

These developments were largely, but not entirely, confined to southern and eastern Britain. In the north and west of Britain, life continued much as it had for centuries, though conditions were not static. Here societies remained typified by small, dispersed settlements, with little evidence for chiefly elites, and seem to have remained more pastoral and with a lower overall population density than in the south. The economy remained more traditional and lacked the development of coinage and professional industries that were emerging elsewhere. Furthermore, it would appear that there was limited access to the trade goods coming in from the continent to these peripheral areas. While there were exceptions, the evidence suggests that the flow of these new trade goods from the continent to the rest of Britain may have been controlled and manipulated by the rising powers in the southeast of Britain.¹⁶ This is not to say that there was a clear-cut divide in Britain neatly separating northwest-with its scattered pastoral clans- from southeast, with its large kingdoms, highly developed economies and burgeoning urban life. In the north, the tribe known as the *Brigantes* had already carved out a large territory for itself in and around the modern day county of Yorkshire, while in Wales the warlike *Silures* controlled the fertile Vale of Glamorgan. However, despite these large territorial groupings, the north and west simply lacked “the intensity of interchange” required for the dramatic socio-economic transformations taking place in the far south and the Thames River valley.¹⁷

By the mid-first century BCE, Brythonic society had changed dramatically. Southern Britain especially witnessed the creation of new regional identities, dominated for the first time by powerful noble dynasties. The creation of “kingdoms based on individual power” was due to both growing populations and the radical influx of new forms of wealth and concepts of authority from the Roman world. This was to have a profound effect upon not just Brythonic society, but also upon the Romans themselves, who were to invade Britain three times in just over a century, for the land encountered by the Roman legionaries was not a primitive wilderness, thinly settled by woad-painted savages, but a well-ordered and managed rural landscape controlled by highly organized and powerful societies with centuries-old warrior traditions.¹⁸

The first military contact with Rome came in the middle of the first century BCE. In 58 BCE, the Roman general Gaius Iulius Caesar launched an invasion of Gaul, sparking a seven-year-long conflict which was to dramatically change the cultural landscape of Western Europe. Moving with remarkable speed, by 56 BCE Caesar had already subdued most of the Gallic tribes, and began to turn his attention across the Channel. In the two seasons he had spent campaigning in Gaul, Caesar noted the frequent presence of Brythonic warriors fighting alongside his Gallic opponents. The presence of Brythonic tribesmen fighting alongside their Gallic counterparts would have come as no surprise to Caesar, who would have been well aware of the extensive political and cultural contacts between Britain and Gaul. Though he had likely already decided upon invading Britain in order to further increase his own political prestige, the presence of these foreign fighters no doubt facilitated his decision.¹⁹

In 55 BCE Caesar landed in what is now the county of Kent with a small expeditionary force of two Roman legions and an approximately equal number of Gallic

auxiliaries. Achieving only limited success with this small force, Caesar returned the following year with an invasion force of five infantry legions and 2,000 cavalry, for a total of nearly 30,000 fighting men. Caesar was opposed this time by an alliance of a number of Brythonic tribes, led by a warlord named Cassivellaunos. Though Cassivellaunos initially refused to give battle to the Romans, Caesar forced the issue by marching northwards into the Thames River valley, the heartlands of the local kings. Though they fought determinedly the Britons were defeated in two successive pitched battles and scattered into the woods to wage a hit-and-run war against Roman supply lines.²⁰ Only after an attack by a union of Kentish chiefs on Caesar's rear-base was thwarted did Cassivellaunos surrender and sue for peace.²¹

After demanding hostages and imposing a yearly tribute upon the Brythonic kings, Caesar returned to Gaul amid rumors of an impending revolt by the Gallic tribes. Indeed, it was the massive uprising led by the Gallic war-chief Vercingetorix in the following year that prevented Caesar from following up his victories in Britain. Nonetheless, the impact of Caesar's two expeditions was substantial, with tens of thousands killed or enslaved, and large parts of the countryside despoiled. As a result of his victories, Caesar secured a pro-Roman client state in the heart of Britain, installing a local prince as king over the *Trinovantes* tribe. This "Eastern Kindom" soon grew tremendously in wealth and power due to its special relationship with Rome, and would have an enormous impact on Brythonic politics over the coming century.²²

A second client state was soon established south of the Thames River, when in 50 BCE a rebel Gallic war chief named Commios fled across the Channel to Britain with a band of followers. Somehow reconciling himself with Rome, Commios established himself as king of the *Atrebates*, a tribe which seems to have held members on both sides of the

English Channel, demonstrating the close cultural ties that already existed between southern Britain and the continent. The political result of Caesar's expeditions therefore was the establishment of two client-kingdoms, the "Eastern Kingdom" of the *Trinovantes* and the "Southern Kingdom" of the *Atrebates*.²³

By creating client-kingdoms with special diplomatic and economic privileges, Rome was to further concentrate power and wealth in the southeast of Britain. As the Eastern and Southern kingdoms grew in influence through their Roman connections, and as Rome came to fully control Gaul and organize it into a Roman province, trade with Rome intensified. The main trading ports in Britain were now on the Essex coast and the Thames estuaries, cementing the control that the client-kingdoms had over access to Roman goods. The trade monopoly enjoyed by the client-kingdoms was to split Britain into three broad economic zones: a core area in the southeast providing direct contact with the Roman world, a peripheral zone which supplied trade goods to the core in return for coin and Roman products, and an outer zone, comprising the far north and west, which was exploited by its neighbors in the peripheral zone for slaves and tribute. Before Britain was ever physically conquered, Roman imperialism had already made serious inroads into Brythonic society.²⁴

The minting of coins in Britain began to develop along a new path following Caesar's conquests. The earliest "Celtic" coins were minted in Gaul and were largely based upon Greek models, specifically the gold *stater* minted by Philip of Macedon (359-336 BCE), with the head of Apollo on one side and a two-horse chariot on the other. By the late second century BCE, when coins began to be minted in Britain for the first time, these designs had become so highly stylized as to be almost unrecognizable. After the conquests of Caesar, however, a new series of coins began to be minted which more closely

resembled those at Rome. The highly abstract designs of the earlier coins were replaced by images and names of specific rulers, many of which bore such Latin titles as “REX”, signifying a conscious emulation of the Roman standard. Furthermore the new coins themselves were made using a different, more highly refined source of gold, suggesting that Rome may have been supplying its new client-states with high quality bullion, perhaps to encourage them to manufacture this new series of coins. The fact that coins minted after Caesar’s conquest rarely show up in the archaeological record alongside the earlier Celtic models suggests that there was a concerted effort to remove the earlier coin models from circulation and replace them with the new, Roman models fashioned from Roman gold.²⁵ It was at this time that the Southern and Eastern client-kingdoms began to mint smaller coins out of lesser ores, suggesting that a true money economy had developed within the core zone of Roman contact. These new, small denomination coins were likely used for everyday purchases, while the larger gold pieces were reserved for extremely high-value transactions or for use as status symbols.²⁶

Direct Roman involvement with Britain was probably limited during this period, despite receiving both hostages and diplomats from Britain. The civil wars following Caesar’s assassination diverted Roman energies and military resources for a time, putting Britain on a diplomatic “back-burner”. During the reign of Augustus Rome imposed heavy duties upon trade between Britain and Roman Gaul, and members of the Brythonic nobility were compelled to travel to Rome to dedicate offerings to the new Emperor and affirm their allegiance to Rome. Such was the perceived control by Rome over the Brythonic kingdoms that the Greek geographer Strabo, writing in Rome during the Augustan era, stated that Rome “had practically made the whole island Roman property”. While this was

an obvious exaggeration, it accentuates the degree to which Britain was already conceived of as being firmly a part of the Roman world.²⁷

Unfortunately for the Britons, the nature of the Roman state necessitated continual conquest²⁸, and the relationship between Rome and her client-states made war an inevitability. Because allegiance to Rome was made upon a personal basis, it had to be renegotiated every time a given leader died or was replaced. Candidates for the thrones of the client kingdoms often were drawn from those men who had spent time at Rome and were therefore the most thoroughly Romanized and likely to favor Roman policy. Should Rome's chosen candidate get passed over or slain, this could provide the pretext for war and direct annexation. A succession dispute between two princes of the Eastern Kingdom, Togodumnus and Caratacus, provided all the incentive Rome required. In 43 CE, the emperor Claudius invaded the Eastern kingdom with a force of more than 40,000 soldiers, and after a brief period of intense fighting, secured the surrender of no less than eleven Brythonic kings, though not that of Caratacus, who fled westward to gather new support against the invading Romans.

The conquest of Britain proved to be a drawn out, bloody affair which took four decades to complete. While the Eastern and Southern kingdoms fell relatively quickly to the Roman war-machine, resistance continued across Britain. Caratacus rallied new opposition to Rome in the west of Britain, becoming for a time the war-chief of the *Silures*. Defeated again, he fled to the territory of the *Ordovices* in northern Wales and ultimately arrived at the court of Cartimandua, queen of the *Brigantes*, who promptly handed him over to the Romans, with whom she had negotiated a political alliance as a client ruler.²⁹

Ultimately, all the tribes of Britain fell under direct Roman authority. During the conquest phase client status seems to have existed for only a single generation, with each

kingdom and its territory passing directly into Roman authority upon the death of its client ruler, as was the case of both the *Brigantes* and the *Iceni*, whose territories were subsumed into the nascent Roman province of Britannia in 61 and 71 CE, respectively. The *Iceni* provided the most serious check on Roman advances in Britain, rebelling under their formidable queen Boudicca in 60 CE, sacking a number of nascent Roman towns before finally being defeated, while the *Silures* of south Wales would continue to resist Rome for nearly 30 years, nearly being exterminated in the process. The Roman conquest of Britain finally culminated with the battle of Mons Graupius, fought in the far north of Caledonia (Scotland), under the leadership of the Roman general and governor of Britain Gnaeus Iulius Agricola in 83-84 CE.

The impact of the Roman conquest upon the people of Britain was devastating. Over the 40 year conquest period an estimated 100,000-250,000 Britons were killed, with untold tens of thousands more sold into slavery. Given an indigenous population of approximately 2 million individuals, this is human destruction on a vast scale. Upon subjugation individual tribes could expect to see large numbers of their people enslaved and their territories divided and parceled up amongst Roman colonists and army veterans. Entire dynasties of tribal elites were disenfranchised or exterminated, to be replaced by those more tractable to Roman authority.³⁰

The transformation of Britain into Britannia was a brutal, protracted affair that proceeded very differently in different parts of the country, with each diverse tribe and kingdom having a distinctive experience coming under Roman rule in the first century CE. Over the course of the following centuries, each would witness dramatic changes to its economic and political structures as Rome transformed the island from a patchwork of tribes and kingdoms into a Roman province.

Conquest to Coronation: Britain 84-306

In the centuries following the completion of the Roman conquest the political, economic and cultural structures of Britain changed significantly. From the victory of Agricola over the Caledonian tribes at Mons Graupius in 84 to the ascension of Constantine the Great as Augustus of the Western Empire at York in 306, Britain had made a dramatic transition from an entirely rural landscape of constantly warring tribal entities into a stable, thriving province of towns, cities, villas, fortresses, temples and churches. The British countryside itself was transformed as the population boomed under the stability and prosperity of Roman rule, while agriculture and industry intensified and expanded into new environs. Though the Roman Empire itself would suffer a series of trials and catastrophes over the intervening centuries, Roman Britain largely avoided the chaos and disruption that would typify the middle Empire, benefitting from its isolated status at the northwest corner of the Roman world, and at the turn of the fourth century Roman Britain stood poised upon the brink of its most prosperous era.

Despite the incredible destruction wrought upon the Brythonic peoples during the protracted conquest, or perhaps because of it, the Roman administration worked swiftly to build the first urban centers in Britain, for if Britain was to become truly Roman, it would require cities. According to the historian Tacitus, the Roman government in Britain courted the favor of the indigenous elites, encouraging them to participate in the urbanization process by contributing both money and native labor “to build temples, public squares, and proper houses”. Additionally, the British aristocrats were urged to instruct their sons in the Latin language, in order to facilitate the growth of Roman culture in the province.³¹

In the Roman world there were three main legal categories under which cities and towns could be organized: *coloniae*, *municipia* and *civitates*. *Coloniae* were towns designated for Roman citizens, often built specifically for the settlement of legionary veterans, with legal codes modeled upon that of the city of Rome. *Coloniae* also had dependent indigenous communities attached to them for the provision of goods and services. In Britain, the three original *coloniae* were Camulodunum (Colchester), Glevum (Gloucester) and Lindum (Lincoln), with their respective territories being carved from the ancestral lands of the local tribes. It is uncertain when the city of Londinium was first founded. While its construction is unlikely to have begun before 50 CE, by the time of the Boudiccan Revolt of 60 it was already a thriving commercial center.³² Razed to the ground during the rebellion, Londinium was swiftly rebuilt and, prospering from the constant movement of goods and military personnel, it quickly became the economic hub of southern Britain and ultimately the capital of Britannia in the late first century CE.³³

Municipia were similar to *coloniae* in that they also possessed Roman legal codes, but differed in that they were not founded specifically for the needs of Roman citizens. Their populations would have been more mixed, especially in the early phases of development, than those of the *coloniae*. St. Albans was an early example of a *municipium*, with Eboracum (York) later being described as one in the early third century.

Civitates were urban centers constructed for specific tribal ethnicities. Unlike *coloniae* and *municipia*, *civitates* lacked a Roman legal charter, and were thus of a lower official status. On the other hand, they were allowed to retain a great deal of local custom in their own legal codes, and thus could provide havens for indigenous peoples resentful of the overbearing presence of the Roman state. The *civitates* of the Empire served as centers for local government, each administered by a city council, and each *civitas* was granted

jurisdiction over a certain tribal territory. Over time, prosperous *civitates* could apply for promotion to either *municipium* or *colonia* status. In Britain, at least sixteen *civitates* were founded over the course of the Roman period.³⁴

Urbanization proceeded apace under the Flavian emperors. Within fifteen years of the Boudiccan rebellion, major civic works had been constructed across southern Britain, including the great forum at Londinium and the bath and temple complex at Aquae Sulis (the modern town of Bath).³⁵ By the end of the reign of the Emperor Hadrian (r. 117-138 CE), Britain may have possessed up to twenty-four major towns as well as a complex highway system. Though it had taken nearly a century, Britain at last had acquired an urban fabric.³⁶

It was under Hadrian and his successor Antoninus Pius that the province of Britannia assumed the shape it would hold for most of the imperial period. Responding to either internal rebellion, renewed raiding along the northern frontier, or perhaps both³⁷, Hadrian ordered the fortification of the frontier in the north of Britain. The construction of the massive works now known as Hadrian's Wall, begun in 122 CE, was indicative of the new defensive mindset of the Roman Empire following its final expansionist phase under the emperor Trajan. The frontier, now set in stone, was 74 miles long from the mouth of the river Tyne in the west to the Solway Firth in the east. Ten feet wide, fifteen feet high, fortified with milecastles and watchtowers and possessing both forward and rear ditches and earthworks, the Wall was an impressive feat of engineering on a massive scale. Additionally, fifteen major forts were constructed along the wall to garrison troops, with three more forts constructed behind the Wall to provide a "defense-in-depth" strategy. The Wall was never intended to be an impenetrable barrier; rather, it was designed to strengthen the northern frontier while controlling the flow of goods and people between

Over the course of the late second century Britannia became a thriving province, with cities and towns containing civic centers and public works, a network of well maintained roads and highways around which grew a whole host of small towns and villages, and a growing acceptance and adoption of Roman culture. Villas began to spring up throughout the countryside, and as the Romanization of the province continued, Romans and Romanized peoples began to arrive in Britain in ever greater numbers, whether as merchants and businessmen or in more official capacities. As trade and commerce took root and a true mercantile economy blossomed, industries grew and intensified in the countryside, and the economic makeup of the population began to change as new opportunities and new forms of wealth became available to an ever-growing segment of the population.³⁹

After the rapid expansion of the first century and the peace and prosperity of the second, over the course of the third century the Roman Empire would receive a series of shocks that would disrupt the very fabric of its society and threaten Roman preeminence in a number of serious ways. The rise of the Sassanian Empire in the east would deal a series of punishing defeats on the Roman army and rob it of some of its most prosperous territories, while in the west a confederation of Germanic tribes known as the *Alemanni* would erupt across the Rhine and rampage through Gaul and Italy, devastating town and country before finally being defeated at Milan. Rome's response to these military crises was to dramatically increase its military expenditure, which in turn led to economic panic as the Roman emperors sought to control every source of revenue in the Empire.⁴⁰ Economic volatility, coupled with repeated military disasters, created a climate of extreme political instability, with ten emperors reigning between 217 and 251, and all but one of them dying violent deaths.⁴¹ Runaway inflation, civil war, assassinations, military disasters

and barbarian invasions would all combine to create what is often called the “Crisis of the Third Century”, a significant transition in Roman history, presaging a long era of turbulence after more than two hundred years of supremacy. Although the events of this crisis would dramatically reshape the military, governance and finances of the Roman Empire, Britain would be spared the worst of the unrest until the end of the century. It was Britain’s stability during this era of chaos that would pave the way for its remarkable prosperity in the first half of the fourth century.⁴²

Two significant political and cultural events of the third century must be mentioned. One was the division of the province into Britannia Superior with its capital at Londinium, and Britannia Inferior with its capital at Eboracum (York), either in the year 197 or 213 (the record is unclear).⁴³ This saw a significant restructuring of the provincial administration, as every office and official now had to be duplicated. Furthermore, the disposition of the military in Britain was reorganized, with two legions controlled by the consular at Londinium and a third administered out of Eboracum. The second event came in the year 212 when the emperor Caracalla, son of Septimius Severus, issued the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, which granted Roman citizenship to all adult males in the Empire.⁴⁴ This had a profound impact upon the peoples of Britain, who until now had remained largely divided between Roman citizens and non-citizen Britons. Although it is likely that by the third century a significant portion of the population had attained Roman citizenship, many rural Britons would have remained non-citizens and therefore may have identified themselves more closely with their local *civitates* than with the Roman Empire as a whole. After citizenship was granted to the male population of Britain, we may begin to speak of a Romano-British culture and society, as opposed to one divided between indigenous Britons and Romans and Romanized foreigners.

Britain's relative stability during this time of crisis could not last. Even before the turmoil of the age reached its shores, there is evidence that Britain was reacting to the upheavals that were ravaging the continent. In around 220 the first in a series of forts were built along the southeastern shores of England. These forts, built at Reculver and Brancaster in the modern counties of Kent and Norfolk respectively, mark the creation of a new defensive system along the southern and eastern coasts that would come to be called the *Litoris Saxonum*, or the "Saxon Shore", as it is called in the late fourth century document the *Notitia Dignitatum*.⁴⁵ It is believed that these forts organized the defense of the southern shores in conjunction with the *classis Britannica*, the Roman fleet which was responsible for patrolling the English Channel and the mouth of the Rhine.⁴⁶ These later forts differed in design and perhaps in function from the early forts at Reculver and Brancaster, for although it is clear by their design that they were intended to be defensive structures, it is uncertain whether they were intended to function as "garrisons, refuges for civilians, or simply fortified ports"⁴⁷.

The third century also witnessed the increasing fortification of towns and cities across Britain. An enormous stone wall was built around Londinium, enclosing some 341 acres of urban territory and making it the largest walled city in the province. Over the course of the third century towers, forts, walls and earthworks were constructed around most of the major towns in all corners of Britain, signaling the increasing militarization and paranoia of the era, for although the civil wars and barbarian invasions that wracked the continent largely bypassed Britain during this period, the people of Britain must have watched these events with increasing agitation.⁴⁸ In addition to the defenses built for the towns of Britain, a series of forts and watchtowers were built along the coasts of western Britain in response to the increasing activities of seaborne raiders from Hibernia (Ireland).

Known to history as the *Scotti* and the *Attacoti*, these tribes would continuously plague the western shores of Britain with piracy and raiding, and would play a key role in the disruption of the province in the later fourth century.⁴⁹

The third century saw the beginning of an ominous political trend in Britain. From the late third century to the early fifth, a number of Roman soldiers would use Britain as a base from which to challenge the political order and attempt to elevate themselves as emperors. The first of these imperial pretenders was a soldier of humble origin named Mausaeus Carausius. Originally stationed in Belgium, in 286 he was charged with clearing the English Channel of Germanic pirates. Alarmed by accusations that he was siphoning off some of the recovered plunder, Carausius responded by fleeing to Britain and declared himself emperor with the support of his troops. This was to be the first time that the provinces of Britain would secede from the greater Empire.⁵⁰ Interestingly enough, Carausius proved himself to be a master of imperial propaganda. Utilizing the newly established mints at Londinium⁵¹ he issued a number of coin series bearing his image alongside images from Classical mythology, phrases drawn from the poems of Virgil as well as the images of his contemporary emperors. What is truly important to note is that, despite Britain now possessing *de facto* independence from the greater Empire, there seems to have been no attempt to restore the ancient Brythonic culture or tribal identities. All the imagery used by Carausius on his British-made coins was distinctly and deliberately Classical, which suggests that, by the late third century, the culture of Britain, or at least that of its army and ruling classes, had become thoroughly Romanized.⁵²

In 293 Carausius was murdered by his finance officer, Allectus, and in 296 Britain was returned once more to the Roman Empire with the invasion of Caesar Constantius*, who met and defeated Allectus in battle in the south of Britain. The arrival of Constantius

would mark the beginning of a serious reorganization of Britain's military infrastructure, which seems to have been allowed to run down during the third century, suggesting that the northern frontier was relatively peaceful during this time.⁵³ Constantius appears to have devoted some serious time and attention to Britain, extensively repairing and rebuilding the fortifications along Hadrian's Wall, before returning to Gaul in 297.⁵⁴

In 305 Constantius returned to Britain as Constantius I, Augustus of the West, and oversaw a new campaign against the northern tribes, who for the first time appear in the historical record with the appellation "*Picti*", or "The Painted Ones". Whether these were a new people or whether they represented a new federation of the *Caledonii* may never be known. Additionally, the historical record is sparse regarding the details of this new campaign; the exact size and composition of the invasion force remains unknown, as does the degree of success or failure it encountered in fighting the Highland tribes. What is certain is that Constantius died shortly after returning to Eboracum in 306, and that his son Constantine was proclaimed emperor by his troops, and with the personal support of a Germanic warlord named Crocus and his contingent of *Alemannic* mercenaries.⁵⁵

The elevation of Constantine to the purple would prove to be a watershed event in the history of the later Roman Empire. While none of the far reaching cultural reforms enacted by Constantine could have been suspected at the time of his ascension, nonetheless the Roman Empire would be fundamentally changed under his rule. For Britain, the coronation of Constantine would mark the beginning of an era of unprecedented prosperity. In fact, the early fourth century is often labeled the "Golden Age" of Roman Britain. This flowering of wealth and culture would prove to be short lived, however, as the events of the fourth century would shake the Roman world in a way that even the catastrophes of the third century did not. In 306, Britain was a stable, peaceful and

prosperous diocese of the Western Empire, an Empire that showed no signs as yet of failing. Little over a century later Britain would have left Rome forever, and the Western Empire itself would be in the midst of its long, slow and strange death.

A Golden Age: Britain 306-337

At the time of Constantine's coronation the chaos that would mark the later Empire could hardly have been foreseen in Britain. The myth that the fourth century was an era of decay in Britain soon crumbles in the face of the archaeological evidence for the period. Britannia had enjoyed a level of stability and peace over the course of the third century that was nearly unique in the Western Empire, and would continue to prosper over the coming years. Far from being a province in decline, Britain in the fourth century was enjoying the era of "exceptional prosperity"⁵⁶, a "Golden Age", which saw its greatest florescence of economic and cultural activity as well as a level of peace and stability unique within the Western Empire. In an effort to present a comprehensive picture of Roman Britain in the first half of the fourth century we will focus on three key areas of fourth century society in Britain: its political and military institutions, its economy and polity and finally the religious and cultural world of the Romano-British.

Political and Military Institutions in the Fourth Century

By Constantine's coronation the Roman Empire itself had undergone a radical transformation, with a corresponding effect upon the garrisoning and governance of Britain. In response to the upheavals of the third century, which had exposed the shortcomings of the Roman military-political apparatus, the Emperor Diocletian dramatically reorganized both the army and the imperial administration. In 286 Diocletian

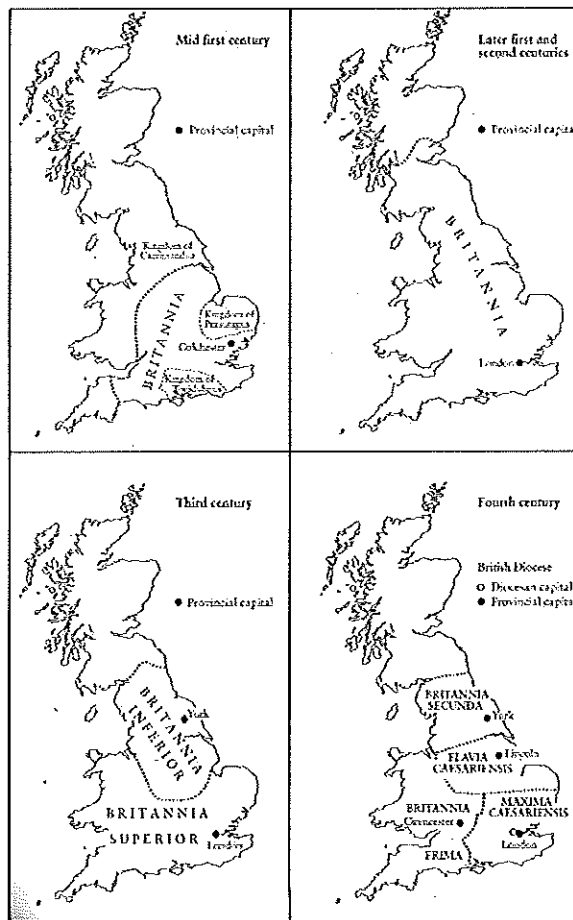
elevated his lieutenant Maximian to the rank of Augustus, and split the rule of the Empire in two, with Maximian ruling in the west and Diocletian in the east. This reorganization was further developed in 293 when Diocletian split the rule of the Empire amongst four men, two senior *Augusti* and two junior *Caesares*. Each Augustus would henceforth govern one half of the Empire, with one ruling in the west and another in the east, and each Augustus would have a junior partner in the person of his Caesar. These *Caesares* would act as enforcers for their respective *Augusti*, who would often charge them with carrying out specific directives or grant them direct authority over certain geographical areas within their half of the Empire.⁵⁷ It was in such a capacity that Constantius was sent to Britain in 293, namely to crush the imperial pretender Allectus and restore Britain to Roman rule.

Constantine continued to enact and expand upon the administrative reforms of Diocletian while in the midst of his struggle for supremacy. In further efforts to stabilize and strengthen the Roman state, the state bureaucracy was once more reorganized in order to further allocate the responsibilities of administering the Empire. The provinces were once again divided by two, so that by 312, the same year as Constantine's fateful victory at Milvian Bridge⁵⁸, the two provinces of Britannia (Britannia Superior and Britannia Inferior) were split into Britannia Prima, Britannia Secunda, Maxima Caesariensis and Flavia Caesariensis. These new provinces were now organized under the newly created political entity of the *diocese*, which had its own civil official called the *vicarius*. Thus the four provinces of Britain were now all under the authority of the Diocese of Britain, which had its own administrative capital at Londinium and was itself under the authority of the Prefecture of the Gauls. Based in Trier, which was often the seat of the Western Emperor and the center for his imperial bureaucracy, the Prefecture of the Gauls held authority over the dioceses of Gaul, Spain, Germany and Britain and was under the charge of the

praefectus praetorianus, the “praetorian prefect”, who was directly appointed by the Emperor and was, along with his praetorian colleagues, one of the highest ranking civil officials in the Empire.⁵⁹

The division of
Roman Britain
1st-4th centuries
Mattingly2007:
pg. 229

In addition to multiplying the number of provinces across the Empire, the reforms of Constantine remade many of the imperial offices which had governed the Empire since its inception, and many formerly military offices were now made purely civil positions. In particular, the office of provincial governor was stripped of military command and converted to a purely civilian post.



This stripping of military command from the provincial offices may have had as much to do with lessening bureaucratic workloads as anything else. With the significant increase in civil offices enacted by Diocletian, it is likely that separation of administrative and military duties did much to streamline governmental affairs.⁶⁰ Command of the military was now under the authority of two newly created military offices, those of the *duces* (singular *dux*, “leader”) and *comites* (singular *comes*, “companion/follower”), with the *duces* being the higher rank.⁶¹

These new military offices were part of the wholesale restructuring of the military which had been begun by Diocletian and was completed under Constantine. By the end of Constantine's rule the old legionary/auxiliary structure of the army had been done away with and the Roman army had been divided into two groups: the *limitanei* and the *comitatenses*. The *limitanei* were stationed along the borders of the Empire, garrisoning its forts and towns and presiding over the flow of goods and peoples across the imperial frontier. The *limitanei* were further divided into *ripenses* ("river-troops", ostensibly stationed primarily along the Rhine and Danube frontiers), *alares* (cavalry) and *cohortales* (infantry), with the *ripenses* being considered the highest grade of frontier troops.⁶² Although they were professional soldiers the *limitanei* were considered the lesser troops of the fourth century Roman army. The elite of the new army were the *comitatenses*, the mobile field armies who would accompany the emperor himself in his perambulations around the Empire.⁶³ These troops differed from the *limitanei* in terms of training, equipment and pay⁶⁴, and often contained large numbers of cavalry in contrast to the earlier armies, which had relied primarily upon legions of heavy infantry.⁶⁵

Another defining characteristic of the new Roman military was the increasing use of Germanic warriors alongside Roman troops. We have already seen that German mercenaries were present in the armies of Constantius, and that they played an integral role in elevating Constantine to power through their war-chief Crocus. Constantine himself was to make increasing use of Germanic troops throughout his career, incorporating large numbers of Germanic infantry into his mobile field forces as *auxiliae*. Despite sharing their name with the tribal auxiliaries of the early Empire, these were in fact new units recruited from Germanic peoples living either outside the Empire or settled within imperial boundaries as *laeti*, tribal peoples allowed to settle within Roman territory in return for

military service.⁶⁶ These new Germanic troops were some of the best in Constantine's mobile armies, and Constantine himself was often accused of "Germanizing" the Roman military.⁶⁷

Britain would see many of these new Germanic troops stationed on its shores over the coming decades. In fact, Germanic warriors, either as mercenaries or enrolled directly into the Roman military, already had a lengthy history in Britain by the fourth century. In addition to the *Alamanni* employed by Constantius, elements of both the Vandal and Burgundian nations were sent to Britain where they were settled as *laeti* after their defeat by the emperor Probus in 277, and the imperial pretenders Carausius and Allectus both employed large numbers of Germanic mercenaries, particularly Franks, in their armies.⁶⁸ In the fourth century Germanic troops were stationed alongside Roman *limitanei* on Hadrian's Wall, including units of Frisian cavalry at the forts of Burgh-by-Sands and Housesteads. Additionally, a German unit called the *numerus Hnaufriði*, "Notfried's Troops", appears to have worshipped at a shrine dedicated to a German twin-god at a fort along the Wall, their presence signified by the existence of graffiti and inscriptions upon the door-jambs and lintels of the shrine.⁶⁹ These Germanic troops would increase both in overall number and as a percentage of the military body in Britain over the course of the fourth century and would influence the development of the newly emerging martial culture of the Late Empire, with Germanic sword-belts and brooches increasingly adopted by the rank-and-file of the Roman army.⁷⁰

In addition to reshaping the political bureaucracy and military commands, the western *Augusti* Constantius and Constantine both made a personal point of rebuilding the frontier defenses of Britain, which had been left in neglect during the confusion of the third century. The lands in the north of Britain received special imperial attention, with the forts

along Hadrian's Wall being refurbished and at least one new fort being constructed. Additionally, it appears that many of the forts along the Pennine Mountains were abandoned, and their troops redistributed along the northern frontier in order to bring the frontier defenses up to strength.⁷¹ Despite this, however, there is evidence that there were fewer troops stationed along Hadrian's Wall as well as in forts across Britain. At a number of forts the large barracks of earlier centuries were replaced by rows of small, individual houses, described as "chalets".⁷² While the earliest examples of these small, free-standing houses are attested at Hadrian's Wall in the third century, they became common in forts across Britain after 300, though there is disagreement as to their exact function.⁷³

In the south of Britain fortifications continued to be improved along the southern and eastern shorelines. Mentioned above as the "Saxon Shore" forts, this series of fortresses and watchtowers too received additional defenses in the first quarter of the fourth century, though the exact role these forts played in the defense of the shores of Britain is uncertain. It was long believed that from the early third century on Britain began to come under increasing threat by various North Sea peoples raiding along the eastern coastline.⁷⁴ This explanation has proved to be unsatisfactory, however, as evidence is lacking for any significant increase in seaborne piracy in Britain in the third century. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the later third and early fourth centuries saw a significant increase in the construction and renovation of these forts, though with several key differences existing between these new forts and those constructed earlier in the third century.⁷⁵ Among these differences were a number of new and more imposing forms of defensive stonework typical of the later Empire, including projecting bastions and towers which enabled archers to direct their fire more easily upon enemies attacking along the walls.⁷⁶ Why these new forts would be made so robust remains uncertain, for if the

southern and eastern shores of Britain were not in fact coming under increasing attack in the third and fourth centuries, then why build them at all, and why so formidably?

The answer may have something to do with the Germanic invasions into Gaul from across the Rhine in the mid-third century. As the Rhine frontier came to be perceived as more and more unstable, a secure source of grain and provision for the Rhine legions needed to be found, one which would not be compromised if Germanic war-bands slipped across the frontier to rampage in eastern Gaul. There is evidence that, from the early fourth century on, cereal production in Britain intensified and mass quantities of grain were shipped across the Channel to supply the Rhine legions. The primary function of the forts may have been to protect the shipping-routes to Gaul, serving as bases for warships patrolling the English Channel, rather than to guard the provinces of Britain from seaborne attack.⁷⁷

A key feature that further differentiated these new forts from their third century predecessors was the large amount of open space within their walls. First and second century Roman forts had a plethora of buildings packed within their walls, including barracks, officer's quarters, granaries, forges, shrines, stables and baths, all arranged along the hallmark Roman grid pattern. While those forts constructed in the early third century largely conform to this pattern of development, the forts of the later third and early fourth centuries lack virtually all these features, with archaeological work revealing sites that seem far more civilian in character than military. Settlement within the imposing walls of these forts appears to have been disorganized, with an unexpected amount of refuse left behind. The discovery of twenty-seven infant skeletons, along with typically feminine artifacts such as looms and spinning wheels, serves to reinforce the view that these forts housed large civilian populations alongside their military garrisons. Finally, most of the

later forts are constructed along the mouths of navigable rivers with extensive access to the interior of the island. This, combined with evidence that indicates large amounts of livestock were processed on site, indicates that the shore forts may have served as “secure-storage” sites, collecting taxes in kind from the population of the interior and storing it for later distribution, either by sea or land.⁷⁸

This hybrid civilian/military nature of the Saxon Shore forts is in fact a central feature of military installations in the late Empire. While the cohabitation of civilians alongside soldiers would have been unusual in earlier periods, by the early fourth century the pattern of military garrisoning had undergone several notable changes, with the nature of the shore forts serving as key examples. In the first half of the fourth century forts were refurbished in line with the models seen along Hadrian’s Wall (smaller troop accommodations) and the Saxon Shore (large internal open spaces)⁷⁹, while towns and cities also received substantial additions to their existing fortifications. Those few towns which had not been fortified over the course of the third century now built expansive circuits of walls around their urban centers. As with the Saxon Shore forts, these new fortifications were often extensive and imposing, with the city of Eboracum in particular receiving elaborate new defenses.⁸⁰

These new defensive works often encompassed large areas of open space within their circuits. This illustrates a key feature of the military reorganizations of the early fourth century, namely the licensing of soldiers to be billeted inside civilian settlements and of civilians to establish residence within the forts. Formerly, the soldiery and citizenry of the Empire had been strictly segregated, with civilians being forbidden to live alongside soldiers within forts, and soldiers barred from establishing residence within townships or from marrying civilians. Interaction between soldiers and civilians was relegated to the

vici, symbiotic civilian townships attached to the legionary fortresses which provided goods and services to the resident soldiers.⁸¹ This was to change under the rule of Constantine, who transferred large numbers of troops from forts to towns across the Empire in an effort to both cut the cost of military spending and to provide a more dynamic defensive strategy than the static linear fortifications of earlier centuries. The new wall circuits of the fourth century were therefore built to encompass extensive open areas which could accommodate the large numbers of troops who were reassigned from the local forts. Additionally, the new, mobile troops known as the *comitatenses* would have required extensive accommodations as they moved about the Empire. The open fields behind the defenses of the town-circuits would have been ideal spaces to temporarily billet large numbers of soldiers, especially in the landscape of the late Empire, which was more tightly managed and densely populated than it had been formerly, making the establishment of large field camps in the open countryside more difficult.

This stationing of troops in civilian areas may account for the evidence of decline in troop numbers at forts across Britain. With many of the *limitanei* stationed in civilian settlements and the *comitatenses* billeted in the towns and cities, there would have been no need for the expansive barracks which dominated the forts of the first through third centuries. Nevertheless, there was a reduction in the size of individual military units over the fourth century. The military units of *cohortes* and *alares* in particular were drastically reduced in size, such that by the end of the fourth century these units were only 10% of their original size. These were the units that comprised the *limitanei* that garrisoned Hadrian's Wall in the north as well as the forts scattered throughout the British countryside.⁸² The extent to which these units had been run down in the first half of the fourth century is unclear, but the process may have already begun by 324, when

Constantine emerged as the sole victor in the struggle for power following his elevation to Augustus at Eboracum. The size of the total garrison of Britain by the end of the fourth century is difficult to ascertain, but likely was no more than 5,000-6,000 *comitatenses* and perhaps 12,500 *limitanei*, for a total of at most 18,500 troops. When compared to the mid-second century maximum of 40,000-55,000 soldiers, this is a dramatic reduction.⁸³

While part of the rationale for this reduction of the British garrison may have been due to Britain's reputation as a launching pad for Imperial usurpers, in an Empire that had begun to struggle with the cost of maintaining itself, this reduction may also have made fiscal sense. The widespread construction of large-scale defenses around even minor civic centers in the early fourth century may have been part of a new strategy of providing a more effective defense of the province while substantially reducing the number of troops on the payroll. When contrasted with the pace of construction that marked the initial fortification of Britain over the course of the third century, the sudden burst of defensive construction in the early fourth implies an imperial mandate, rather than the initiatives of local communities. With the towns and cities of Britain now fortified and garrisoned, each town could become a fortress unto itself, eliminating the need for many of the forts scattered throughout the countryside. Furthermore, the towns themselves would have picked up a significant portion of the cost of feeding, housing and equipping the troops now stationed inside their walls, further reducing the strain of the military upon the imperial purse.⁸⁴

The picture that emerges of the political and military administration in Britain in the first half of the fourth century is one of dynamic change in response to the new demands and limitations of the late Empire. This would have a profound effect upon the cultures of both the military and the professional classes of Britain. For centuries, in order

to achieve high political office in the Roman Empire, one was obliged to pursue a career as an officer in the military. Thus the career of the politician and that of the senior military officers were one and the same, and those who pursued this career path were drawn from the same social classes. After the early fourth century the two career paths diverged completely, and there emerged for the first time in Roman society distinct political and military classes, with civil offices being staffed largely from the old senatorial and equestrian classes of Roman society and high military offices filled from the (increasingly Germanic) rank and file. One result of this divergence in roles was that many newly civilian offices adopted militaristic dress, insignia and even title, perhaps seeking to hold on to that special prestige which had always attached itself to military service in Roman society.⁸⁵ The military itself began to have a far smaller presence in Britain than it had previously with the soldiers themselves, though still possessing a separate and distinct identity, living and working in far closer proximity to the civilian population of Britain than ever before. In this context the purpose of the “chalets” found in forts across Britain can be better understood. In light of the smaller scale of the military in Britain after 300 as well as the appearance of civilian populations within what had previously been strictly military installations, these small, individual houses may have served either as accommodations for smaller units of troops, or perhaps as residences for officers and their families.⁸⁶

As a result of the new living conditions for the soldiery, as well as the gradual drawing down of the garrison of Britain, the military of the British provinces has often been conceived as being in a state of decay during the fourth century. While it is true that the role and nature of the military was being reinvented at this point in Roman history, as we have seen this was a response to the changing demands of the Empire, rather than the

onset of a slow decline. The *limitanei* of the forts and frontiers were not simple “border guards” or militias⁸⁷, but were instead professional soldiers with more limited duties than those which fell to the *comitatenses*. Furthermore, the reduction of the garrison in Britain was not due to any crumbling of the imperial administration or impoverishment of the province. It was instead a rational response to the financial and political constraints of the time. Finally, far from being in the stages of incipient anarchy, Britain in the early fourth century was a province largely at peace, and it was this stability that allowed Constantine to begin to safely remove troops from Britain and station them in more troubled areas of the Empire. Britain stood as an example of stability and security in an increasingly troubled Empire, with political and military institutions that had been reshaped into new entities in order to better meet the demands of the new century.

Economy and Polity

The diocese of Britannia began the fourth century in a strong position compared to the rest of the Empire. Having avoided the worst of the third century’s crises, the economy of Britain, both rural and urban, had been allowed to develop more or less continuously since the first century, and by the time of Constantine possessed a rich and varied economic fabric. The introduction of an urban way of life and a true market economy revolutionized the way the indigenous Britons worked, farmed and related to each other. Roman civilization did not affect all areas of Britain equally, however, and the landscape of the British provinces in the Late Empire possessed varying degrees of “Romanization”. Roman efforts in building upon and reshaping the landscape varied from place to place as Roman administrations elected to invest energy and resources in developing certain areas of Britain while leaving others relatively underdeveloped, according to the needs of the

Roman state and the suitability of the terrain. While agriculture expanded substantially in the south and east of Britain during the Roman period, in the northern and western zones it largely retained its Iron Age character. Rural industries varied in type and organization across the countryside, with the highland and lowland zones serving as centers for mining operations and pottery production respectively. Settlements too differed depending upon the landscape. For example, although many villas were constructed in Britain as the province grew in wealth and segments of its population came to adopt elite Roman material culture, they tended to cluster in the south and east of the land, and were almost entirely absent from the north and west.⁸⁸ Cities and towns too were almost completely absent from this area, which remained under military control for most of its history.⁸⁹ At the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that Britain developed into two distinct zones: a “civil zone” in the southeast which possessed flourishing urban centers, civilian governance and a villa economy, and a “military zone” in the highlands of the north and west which lacked both the urban development and the acquisition of elite Roman material culture which typified the southeast.⁹⁰

Pre-modern economies revolved around agriculture, and Britain was no different. As 80-90% of the total population lived in the countryside, agriculture would have therefore been the primary economic activity for the bulk of the population in Roman period.⁹¹ Although agriculture was already highly developed in the Late Iron Age, the coming of Roman civilization nonetheless wrought substantial changes in British agricultural practice, most significantly by increasing the scale and intensity of production. The farmlands of Roman Britain had to produce enough surplus to feed both the Roman military, which at the height of its deployment in Britain is estimated to have required at least 100,000 acres of land under grain cultivation alone⁹², as well as the urban population.

Although small in comparison to other provinces, this demographic would still have been a new addition by Rome to a landscape that had previously been entirely rural. Agricultural output had to increase in order to sustain the existence of the Roman state in Britain. In fact, during the first half of the fourth century agriculture in Britain reached levels of intensity that would not be seen again until the High Middle Ages.⁹³

Rome also brought with it a plethora of new food crops and technical innovations which both diversified British agriculture and significantly increased its output. New crops included fruits such as apples, cherries and plums as well as many modern British vegetable staples in the form of carrots, beets and cabbages.⁹⁴ New technologies such as mechanical mills and wheeled ploughs made it easier to work the land and process harvests, while vastly improved drainage techniques opened up new areas of the landscape to agriculture.⁹⁵ The Fens of East Anglia in particular show evidence of far more occupation and exploitation during the Roman period than in the preceding Iron Age, and by the fourth century large areas of former marshland were producing wool, grain and salt for the marketplace.⁹⁶ The introduction of these imperial markets and the creation of a monetary economy were key developments which contributed to the expansion of agriculture in Britain under Roman rule. While the indigenous farms of the Late Iron Age were certainly capable of producing large quantities of grain, it was the creation of a market economy that provided the impetus for producing grain, vegetables and meat on truly enormous scales.

Another feature that greatly affected agricultural practices in Britain was the advent of the large-scale farming estates that were the hallmark of the landowning Roman elites. As a result of the Roman conquest of Britain old patterns of landownership and land-usage were changed as Roman and Romanized elites took possession of large estates, each

incorporating numerous indigenous farms, across the countryside. While each estate had to provide a certain percentage of its output to the Roman state, especially during the fourth century when the Roman military began to be garrisoned in urban centers, the majority of these crops would have been sold on the open markets. With each estate owner seeking to maximize his profits, cultivation would have been greatly intensified to produce the greatest surpluses possible. These grand agricultural estates were built around the elite rural residences known as villas. Strictly speaking the term “villa” merely meant a farmhouse, but long before the fourth century it had come to mean a country residence of some wealth and prestige, and covered not only the main house itself but also its attendant outbuildings, such as ovens, kilns, workshops etc.⁹⁷ It is this function as a farmhouse which made up the bulk of the economic activity found at villa sites. These villas were the nuclei of vast farming systems organized by individual landowners, each seeking to maximize agricultural productivity. Given that a single villa could serve as the economic center for multiple farms and villages, spread out and dispersed over great areas, such an operation could be of enormous financial importance to both the elite landowners as well as the rural communities as a whole.⁹⁸ The transportation infrastructure created by the Romans facilitated the movement of goods and products across the countryside, which in turn allowed estate-owners to ship their surpluses to those urban markets willing to pay the highest price. It was this combination of large estates, urban markets, a money economy and ease of transportation, all introduced by the Romans, which truly revolutionized agriculture in Britain and created what is known as the “villa economy”.⁹⁹

This model of intensive, profit-driven agriculture was not the norm across all of Britain, but was largely relegated to the more fertile soils and denser populations of the southeast. In the north and west, large-scale agriculture existed primarily to supply the

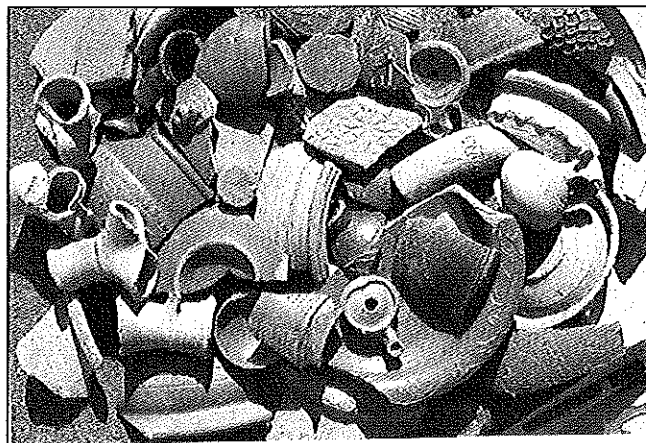
Roman military, whose forts dominated the local landscapes. These state-run farms represented the single greatest change to the rural farming practices of the northwest during the Roman period, for although grain cultivation was well established in the highland zones of Britain prior to the Roman conquest, nothing existed during the Iron Age that was comparable with the vast upland grain fields established to feed the Roman garrisons.¹⁰⁰ Outside of these state-run farms, rural life would have remained much the same as it was during the Iron Age, with settlement dominated by small, dispersed farms and animal husbandry. In the northwest the Roman state invested heavily in an altogether different form of economic activity, namely the extraction of mineral resources.

The mineral resources of Britain were of paramount importance to the Roman state, and the invading forces of the Roman army would have sought to secure all known mineral deposits as soon as they were identified. However, whereas the transformation of agriculture in Britain primarily benefitted wealthy Roman and Romanized landowners, the Roman state itself largely controlled mineral resources and their corollary profits. Given the tremendous value of Britain's mineral resources, it is not surprising that the Roman state maintained monopolies upon the extraction and refinement not only of precious metals, but also of salt and building stone, including the highly valued Purbeck marble produced in Somerset.¹⁰¹ Most of the wealth generated by the British mines would have flowed directly to either the Roman military or the imperial government itself. The importance of controlling these resources is easily recognized by the distribution of military forts across the British landscape. Of the more than 1,000 forts constructed across Britain, the vast majority of them were built in the highland zones of the north and west. In this so-called military zone, the naked power of Rome as a predatory, militaristic state would have been all too apparent to the local peoples.

Under Rome the extraction of mineral resources exploded in scale, and Britain soon became a major producer of both precious and utilitarian metals, including gold, silver, copper, lead and tin.¹⁰² By the fourth century major mining operations were to be found in Cornwall, the Pennine Mountains and throughout the Welsh highlands.¹⁰³ Lead in particular was of extreme value to the Roman economy, and major military installations can be found in proximity to nearly every lead mining operation in Britain.¹⁰⁴ This is in part due to the fact that silver is commonly extracted from lead during the refinement process, but also because lead was perhaps the single most utilized metal in the Roman Empire, and would have been used in everything from cookware to plumbing. Thus the extraction of lead was of dual economic significance, with lead produced in Britain distributed for consumption both within the province and for export to the Continent, while the extracted silver would have been shipped directly to the Imperial treasuries.¹⁰⁵ Lead and tin production reached their height in the fourth century as a domestic pewter industry began to flourish with a concurrent increase in the demand for its two principal ingredients. Despite this Britain continued to export lead to the Continent well into the fourth century, indicated by the discovery of a late Roman shipwreck containing 22 tons of lead ingots off the north coast of Armorica.¹⁰⁶

In contrast to the state-controlled mining industries of the northwest, the southern and eastern "civil zone" of Britain developed its own models of rural industry. In the pre-modern world, a great deal of craftwork and production would have taken place in the countryside as opposed to the cities, and Roman Britain was no different. The same markets and road systems that made such an impact upon agriculture helped foster a thriving provincial economy as foodstuffs, hides, textiles and manufactured and luxury goods moved across the diocese of Britannia. In particular pottery, due to its abundance

and survivability in the archaeological record, is typically used by historians as a measure of economic activity in ancient societies.¹⁰⁷ Prior to the Roman conquest Britain had already possessed a thriving pottery industry, both exporting and importing large quantities of high quality wares.¹⁰⁸ With the coming of the Roman Empire however this domestic production exploded in scale, with natural clay deposits exploited on a far greater scale than during the Iron Age and many new production techniques coming into use, including slip-casting to give pots a glossy finish as well as the potter's wheel, which facilitated the mass production of pottery necessary to supply the growing provincial markets.¹⁰⁹ As the economy grew Britain became a net exporter of various trade goods to Continental markets, particularly in the form of the massive grain shipments to the Rhine frontier mentioned above.¹¹⁰



A collection of Roman era pottery shards dredged from the Thames River.

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In Britain under the Roman Empire pottery came to be produced on near industrial levels. Initially most pottery was purchased and used within a short distance of the place of its production, with only a few specialized pottery types being produced for distribution across Britain, largely to the military.¹¹¹ Production was generally relegated to the

countryside, with the small-scale local artisan of the pre-Roman period quickly being replaced by mass-production in large manufactories. These were established wherever the resources necessary for large-scale production occurred naturally, with factories requiring both sources of suitable clays and substantial woodlands necessary to fire the kilns. Therefore most large pottery manufactories were located within the lowland zones of Britain, particularly in the heavy clays of the river valleys of the south. By the fourth century major centers of pottery production included the Nene Valley, Oxfordshire, the New Forest and Alice Holt factories, all of which were producing large amounts of pottery both for local consumption and for long-distance trade.¹¹² By the middle of the fourth century the diocese of Britannia was producing millions of high-quality vessels each year.¹¹³

The two very different industries of mining and pottery production serve to illustrate the fact that, despite the centrality of agriculture, the economy of rural Britain was a diverse entity, and in many respects had reached the height of its productivity in the first half of the fourth century. It is important now to delve into the demographics of Roman Britain, for only by having an understanding of the scale of the population can we derive a portrait of the nature of life in Britain in the fourth century. Economic and political structures, settlement patterns and cultural dynamics make little sense if we have no idea as to the numbers of people involved in them. Furthermore, the question of population is crucial if we are to address the issue of decline versus stability in the century following the collapse of the Roman state in Britain, as economic continuity and cultural survival in the fifth century can only be fully understood in the context of reasonably accurate population figures.

Unfortunately, there is a total lack of contemporary figures for the period. Modern estimates of population levels in the Late Empire vary wildly. It is generally believed that Roman civilization brought an overall improvement in the “health and nutrition” of the peoples of Britain¹¹⁴, and it has been demonstrated that Roman agriculture improved and expanded upon Iron Age practices¹¹⁵, especially in terms of scale of production. Thus it seems reasonable to assume at least some degree of population increase under the Roman Empire. At one end of the spectrum, in what might be labeled the “continuity” argument, certain scholars¹¹⁶ hold that no significant improvements were made by the Romans upon native Brythonic agriculture, and thus populations would not have substantially increased over the Roman period, giving us an estimate of around 2 million individuals by the fourth century. Other estimates range from 3.6 million¹¹⁷ all the way to 5 to 8 million¹¹⁸, the latter figures representing what might be called the “maximal” estimate, derived from the position that intensification of agriculture and improvement in diet brought about by the Romans allowed populations to reach the maximum level allowed by the landscape of Britain before the advent of modern agricultural techniques. Given that figure of approximately 2 million was utilized above during our discussion of the first century CE, and working from an understanding of agricultural expansion and dietary improvement as well as a far greater degree of peace and stability under Roman rule than was the norm under the aggressive tribal societies of the Iron Age, an estimate of 4 million Romano-Britons will be selected here for the early fourth century, which is a relatively conservative estimate.

The vast majority of this population would have dwelt in the countryside, with perhaps only 10% of the populace living in urban centers¹¹⁹. Given the small size of cities in Britain relative to the great metropolises of the Mediterranean, Britain would have

possessed a decidedly rural character when compared to other parts of the Empire. The exact nature of this rural settlement has been the subject of much academic debate over the course of the twentieth century, with innovations in archaeology forcing scholars to dramatically revise their conceptions about population and settlement in the British countryside. Formerly, most archaeological work focused on sites that were readily identifiable as “Roman”, including the *coloniae*, *municipia* and *civitates* that made up the urban fabric of Roman Britain, as well as the legionary forts, roads and depots that were the hallmark of Roman military activity in the countryside. Rural settlement was considered to be best represented by the villa, that quintessential feature of Roman country living, and as such when the nature of “rural settlement” was discussed, it was always in terms of the villa and villa economy. The peasantry of the British countryside was for years virtually invisible in the archaeological record, and was therefore seldom studied and poorly understood. Due to the disproportionate visibility of the villa and the apparent paucity of non-elite rural sites, the rural population was thought to be quite low and largely clustered around, and dependent upon, the villas of the Romanized elite.

Advances in archaeology and especially in aerial photography have shown us a completely different picture, with the number of identified rural sites having increased dramatically since the middle of the twentieth century. In the 1950’s only around 2,500 rural settlements were known across Britain, while today nearly 100,000 sites datable to the Roman period have been identified, with the more densely inhabited regions possessing nearly one site per square kilometer. To put it another way, in the 1950’s villas comprised around 20% of those sites identified as being part of the Romano-British countryside; today they make up only 2%, for a 25:1 ratio of non-villa to villa rural sites.¹²⁰ Many of these non-villa rural sites have been identified as belonging to the Romano-British

peasantry, whose settlements ranged in scale from dispersed roundhouses which had changed little from the pre-Roman era to the large nucleated villages which sprang up around villa sites and along the Roman highway system. Indeed, for years the nucleated village-type settlement was considered to have first appeared in Britain with the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in the mid-fifth century, with the Romano-British peasantry living exclusively in isolated farmhouses scattered throughout the countryside. It is now certain that nucleated villages were not only present in Roman Britain, but were in fact quite commonplace in the rich farmlands of the south and east.¹²¹

While recent scholarship has reinvented our understanding of the composition of the ancient landscape of Britain, no treatment of rural life in the Roman period would be complete without discussing the villas of the Roman elite. The luxurious country lifestyle represented by the villa had a long history in Roman culture, and was enthusiastically adopted by the moneyed classes of Britain. Villa construction in Britain is considered to have reached its height in the early fourth century, with a tremendous upsurge in both the construction of new villas and the elaboration of existing ones after 300. In fact, the majority of the more than 2,000 identified villa sites in Britain were built in the late third through mid-fourth century, and are found almost entirely within the “civil” zone of the south and east.¹²² Even during a period when the towns and cities of Britain were busy constructing elaborate new defenses during this period, wealthy Romano-British still spent tremendous amounts of money building undefended, oftentimes opulent mansions in the countryside, sometimes quite far away from the safety of city walls, bolstering the picture of Roman Britain being a place of both prosperity and security in the first decades of the fourth century.¹²³

The paucity of Roman material culture in the military zone is striking in comparison with the developments which took place in the civil zone of the south and east. In the north and west, populations seem to have remained comparatively small and dispersed, with few nucleated villages and fewer towns. In the northeast, in the territory surrounding the provincial capital of Eboracum, some evidence exists for limited villa construction by local elites, but it did not compare to the richness found at sites in southern Britain, and were built strictly around Roman roads and military installations. In the northwest, villas were entirely absent, and landscape was wholly dominated by Roman military infrastructure. Those settlements of the Roman type which did exist were the *vici*, the civilian townships which sprang up around Roman forts. Life for the rural Britons of the northern and western zones appears to have continued much as it had for centuries, typified by small, scattered homesteads and lacking both the villa economy and the Roman material culture of the civil zone.¹²⁴ Much of northern Britain in particular seems to have remained under direct military rule throughout the entirety of the Roman period, with little evidence for the penetration of Roman culture into either elite or peasant society.¹²⁵

While the vast majority of the population of Roman Britain lived in the countryside, the one feature that serves best to differentiate life in Britain under the Roman Empire from the Iron Age was the development of an urban society. While pre-Roman Britain had developed a number of settlement types which clearly superseded simple villages and hamlets in terms of economic activity and density of population, truly urban centers with gridded street layouts and civic planning were developed for the first time under Roman administration. Similarly to economic development, the construction of urban centers proceeded very differently in the military and civil zones of Britain. While only nine urban centers were developed in the north and west, more than thirty-five were

built across the civil zone of the south and east.¹²⁶ This uneven distribution of urban development serves to reinforce the degree of regional difference in economy and social identity in Britain under the Roman Empire. For if Roman life was by definition an urban life, it becomes readily apparent that across large areas of Britain a Roman identity was simply not available to a significant part of the population.

By the early fourth century this urbanized Roman way of life was undergoing a significant transformation across the diocese of Britain. A decline in public works and civic architecture coupled with an apparent diminution of urban craft and industrial activity has for long been interpreted as a sign of economic and even population decline. This has often been considered to be symptomatic of the supposed decay and impoverishment of Britain in general during the fourth century.¹²⁷ In fact, it was thought that the urban life in Britain never really took hold, and that its towns and cities began their decline as early as the late second century.¹²⁸ While it is true that the provinces of Britain were never as fully urbanized as other parts of the Empire¹²⁹, nonetheless its cities and towns still retained a vital role in the economy and governance of the British diocese. For if the cities of fourth century Britain began to lose some of their dynamism, it was not because the diocese in general was growing poorer, but rather that the focus of the economy was moving from town to country. The evidence suggests that the relative decline in prosperity in the urban landscape of Britain was in fact a response by the moneyed classes to the changing socio-economic conditions of Britain in the Late Empire, and does not necessarily reflect either a collapsing economy or a declining population. In the early fourth century it was the small towns of the countryside that truly prospered in Britain, while the larger cities did not decline from their former imperial grandeur so much as they simply transformed into a different sort of urban center.

When speaking of the “towns” of Roman Britain, what is meant are those smaller urban centers outside the *coloniae*, *municipia* and *civitates*. Such “towns” generally lacked the scale of civic planning and insular organization which are the hallmark of cities across the Roman Empire, but were substantially larger and more economically sophisticated than the simple nucleated farming villages found throughout the countryside. By the fourth century many of these small towns possessed some form of defensive walls, but they are still easily distinguished from the chartered Roman towns by a distinct lack of street grids and official buildings such as forums or basilicas. Excavations within these defensive circuits reveal an almost confusing array of streets, lanes, houses and shops that seem to have sprung up organically, rather than being directed by a central civic authority. These types of settlement are found in great numbers across the civil zone of the southeast, and their numbers suggest that a fairly large percentage of the population lived within these quasi-urban developments.¹³⁰

Despite their lack of planning these smaller towns were nonetheless densely settled and appear to have been centers of intensive and varied economic activities. Agriculture would have been of primary importance, especially in the fourth century as the villa economy of the countryside reached its peak of productivity. In fact most of the villas of Britain could be found within a day’s ride of these smaller country towns, and it is believed that the towns and villas of Britain had a symbiotic economic relationship with each other. The towns would have served as market centers for the produce of the villa farms, and would have provided a local source of goods and services both for the villa owners and for their dependent farmers. In return, the villas would have been crucial sources of currency for towns that lay a good distance from the major urban centers, and may have provided much needed patronage for town development.¹³¹

Despite the centrality of agriculture to these country towns, there is evidence for an abundance of craftwork and light industrial activity in many of the small towns of Britain, including glass-making, textiles, metallurgy and leatherworking. In earlier periods most of these industries would have been concentrated in the suburbs of the larger urban centers. Starting in the late third century, however, these industries left the cities and relocated to the small towns of the countryside. These towns became the new centers of industry and craftwork, distributing manufactured goods to the vast rural population on the farms and villas.¹³² The reasons for this widespread transference of manufacturing from the cities to the small towns remain uncertain, but the overall strength of the rural economy and the increasing material demands of the villa elites suggests that it may have been simple market economics, which dictated that centers of production be relocated closer to their main areas of consumption. Whatever the reasons, the small towns of Roman Britain had become thriving centers of agriculture and light industry by the middle of the fourth century.¹³³

Yet the evidence for an urban decline is compelling, as the major cities of Britain show clear signs of failing civic standards. The forum and basilica complexes were the centers of commercial and political activity in cities across the Roman Empire, and lay at the heart of the Roman conception of urban life.¹³⁴ Yet in cities across Britain these very structures show signs of increasing disrepair from the late third century on, with many public buildings eventually being either abandoned or reused for other, distinctly non-Roman uses in the fourth century. The basilica at Calleva (Silchester) in modern Hampshire seems to have been retrofitted as a center for metalworking sometime in the early fourth century, while the basilica at Venta Silurum (Caerwent) in southern Wales was demolished completely by the middle of the century. In other major cities the

basilica/forum complexes were either deliberately demolished, or simply never repaired after natural disasters such as fire and flooding. Even the diocesan capitol of Londinium seems to have completely destroyed its own enormous forum and basilica shortly after 300.

The root of this decline in public spaces lay in the marginalization of Rome's traditional civic elites. In the early Empire Roman cities were governed by an *ordo* (council) of 100 members, called *decuriones* (*curiales* in the later Empire), who met at the forum/basilica complexes of their respective towns to perform the necessary functions of local government such as hearing petitions and court cases, legislating policy and, most importantly, levying both local and national taxes. In order to qualify for election as a *decurion*, one had to have sufficient property and wealth, and as such the governments of the cities of the Roman Empire were made up of oligarchies of the wealthiest local families.¹³⁵ By using his personal wealth to fund the construction of grand monuments and public amenities, a wealthy individual could win the influence and renown necessary to be elected to the city *ordo*.¹³⁶ In the late third through mid-fourth centuries however, a number of legal initiatives transformed the nature of city governance as a wave of legislation began to radically centralize the imperial bureaucracy. The role of tax collector passed from the city councils to employees of the central imperial government, known as the *honorati*. Furthermore, local taxes no longer stayed local, but rather were paid into the central coffers to be redistributed later. Finally, during the reign of Constantine II in the middle of the fourth century, the cities of the Roman Empire were divested of the lands which had been allocated them as legal corporations, with these lands being transferred to direct imperial ownership, leading to a sharp decline in local tax revenues.¹³⁷

These centralizing reforms did much to diminish the power and influence of the provincial aristocracies as the local magistrates, called *curiales* (after the *curia*, or council-chamber), now found themselves shut out of much of the activity of local government. In fact, most of the more sought after roles in local governance were granted to retired *honorati*, to the effect that this new class of government bureaucrat, rather than public officials, became more influential in local politics. Given that the roles and functions of the city councils had been almost entirely taken over by the central government, many provincial elites now opted to enroll in this imperial bureaucracy at the expense of their local councils, and subsequently there was less need for the basilicas and forums which had lain at the heart of city governments in earlier years.¹³⁸

All of this led to a deliberate avoidance of local government office on the part of the aristocracies of the later Roman Empire.¹³⁹ This “flight of the *curiales*”, saw the provincial aristocracies abandon their cities for the countryside, where they might avoid the burdens of local office.¹⁴⁰ The cities were not completely abandoned however, and the early fourth century witnessed a peak in the construction of grand town houses as within city limits, demonstrating that wealthy provincials found it necessary to maintain impressive residences both in town and country, and may have split their time and business between the two.¹⁴¹

The cities of Britain retained something of their former importance inasmuch as they remained the part time residences of the Romano-British elite. The florescence of sumptuous townhouses in fourth century Britain must have brought a concurrent influx of money into the cities, as each of these townhouses would have required large numbers of artisans and craftsmen to construct. The presence of wealthy Romano-Britons along with their families and entourages would have created a demand in the cities for the high-end

goods and services required by the elites to maintain their lifestyles. These products may not have been easily supplied by the rustic small towns of the countryside, to the effect that the heart of urban economic life likely revolved around the needs of the rich for luxury goods which could only be supplied by select, high-quality workshops.¹⁴²

The decline of the cities of Roman Britain was therefore due not to economic stagnation, but was the rearrangement of vital economic activities coupled with the decreasing relevance of cities as centers of local government. If the urban centers lost some of the intensity of activity they had in earlier years, this was only because much of that activity was relocated elsewhere. The cities of Britain remained relatively densely populated well into the fourth century¹⁴³, and transformed themselves into more economically independent entities as the influx of currency declined when the centers of trade and craft production moved into the countryside. The utilization of the obsolete forums and basilicas as metalworking facilities, town gardens and even waste dumps reflected the necessities of a new era in urban living. These new activities in the former public buildings of the city center were in fact well organized endeavors, rather than simple "squatter activity", and the very fact that clean water was supplied, and refuse collected and disposed of, shows that there were still functioning urban authorities in fourth century cities.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, when we envision the cities of Britain in the first half of the fourth century, it should not be as the dying institutions of an already failing Empire, but rather as fully-functioning communities that, while having lost some of their old civic luster, nonetheless remained as living, breathing institutions in an Empire that was undergoing rapid socio-economic changes.

Culture and Worship

In addition to the extensive political and economic changes at work across the Roman Empire in the early fourth century, the people of Roman Britain were themselves changing the way they perceived and portrayed their cultural and spiritual identities. The changing roles of the nobility made for new concepts in the display and presentation of social power, while the increasing Germanization of the army led to a refashioning of the age old character of the Roman military. The traditional deities and spirits of Romano-Celtic religion continued to thrive in fourth century Britain, but this would change as foreign influences began to play an ever greater role in the spiritual life of the Romano-British peoples.

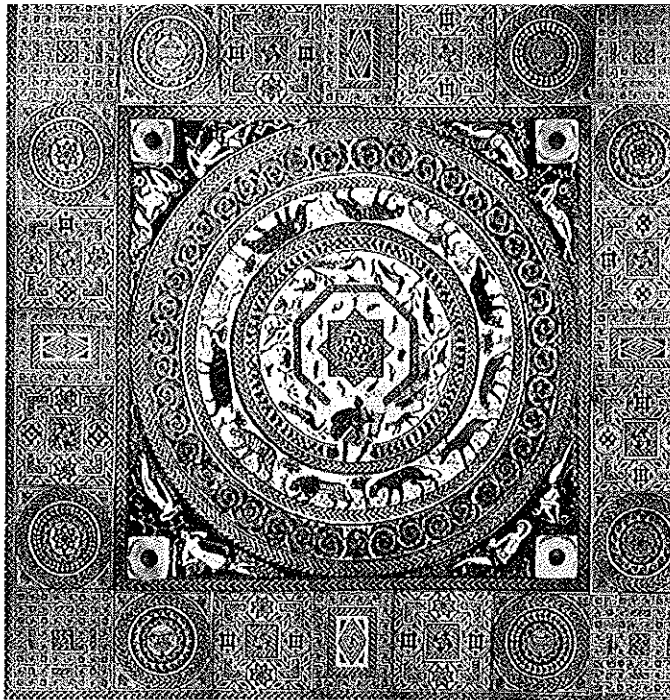
The decline in the importance of civic corporations and the public spaces they utilized led to new concepts of power and influence amongst the elite classes of Romano-British society. The eclipsing in importance of the *curiales* by the *honorati* is a prime example of the general trend in the later Empire that saw the balance of power shift from the urban councils to the imperial bureaucrat. The decreasing use of the urban civic centers is a symptom of this trend, which may best be summarized as the rise of individual power and influence at the expense of the age-old public institutions. In this context the construction of grand, palatial residences in both urban and rural settings implies a need on the part of the provincial grandees to conspicuously display their personal wealth. A key feature shared by both the rural villas and urban townhouses of fourth century Britain was the grand reception chamber. While elite Roman residences had always had an area set aside for the reception of guests, the late third and fourth century elite residences of Britain appear to have significantly increased the scale and opulence of these chambers. Built to admit large numbers of visitors at once, these reception halls often held the finest mosaics

and wall-paintings of the residence, and were designed to impress upon the visitor the wealth of the owner and his access to, and identification with, Roman culture. One particularly large villa excavated at Woodchester covered 45,920 square feet and had over fifty separate chambers.¹⁴⁵ Its grand hall measured nearly 2,500 square feet in size, and its opulent décor would have left visitors in no doubt as to the wealth and importance of its owner.¹⁴⁶ While the conducting of personal business at one's residence was nothing new in Roman culture; the apparent increase in importance of these reception chambers, coupled with a decline in the usage of public spaces, suggests that much of the former public business of the Empire had moved indoors and into the private sphere.¹⁴⁷ Instead of being able to freely associate with one's social superiors in the grand public forums, one now had to be invited inside these palatial residences in order to do business. This refashioning of the public official into the private potentate is one of the major changes to affect elite culture in the fourth century.

The villas themselves could be quite opulent, with elaborate mosaics decorating its floors and walls, multiple bedrooms, dining halls, reception chambers and baths. Not all were as extravagant as Woodchester, of course, but a certain degree of architectural and cultural pretension is usually considered the characteristic which defines a villa. These pretensions are essential for our discussion of Romano-British culture in the fourth century, as the conspicuous display of elite Roman culture found at villa sites across Britain suggests that the ruling classes of Britain had adopted Roman culture as their own. The best preserved evidence for this are the elaborate mosaics that decorated the floors of even very modest villa sites. These mosaics nearly all depict scenes and figures from Classical myths, including Apollo, Bacchus, Orpheus, Medusa, Mercury and Neptune, among others, as well as many quintessential aspects of elite Roman country living, such

as hunting and hawking. While the majority of the imagery is pagan, two known examples of Christian imagery exist, both dateable to the early fourth century, and incorporate the immediately recognizable *chi-ro* symbol used to signify Christ in the ancient world.

Strangely enough, these bits of Christian symbolism occur in mosaics that are otherwise rife with pagan imagery, suggesting a fluidity of religious identity in the early fourth century.¹⁴⁸



Mosaic depicting the myth of Orpheus taming the beasts of the woods with his song. Found at the site of the palatial Woodchester villa, at 15 sq. meters this is the largest mosaic north of the Alps.

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These mosaics suggest that the villa occupants thoroughly identified themselves as belonging to the Greco-Roman culture of the Empire. As with the coinage of Carausius mentioned earlier, there is a distinct lack of specific images or references to Celtic imagery or mythology. Combined with the overwhelming abundance of Roman material culture at these sites in the form of pottery, statuary, dress and food, the picture that emerges is of a thoroughly Romanized elite. Just who comprised this rural upper-class is uncertain, but the tremendous amount of money spent to assert and display the “Roman-ness” of the villa

occupants suggests that the rural elites of Britain were mostly Romanized Britons, either descended from the Iron Age tribal aristocracies or families that had become wealthy and influential through their assimilation to the Roman way of life, who sought to assert their social pedigrees through the conspicuous display of classical Roman culture.¹⁴⁹ What is even more striking than the dominance of Roman culture among the elite classes of Britain is the degree to which that same material culture penetrated the rural peasantry across the civil zone. The density of Roman goods and items found across rural Britain suggests that a broad segment of the population in this zone was heavily Romanized by the fourth century, with Roman material goods found in even in the most remote and impoverished of rural sites. This is in stark contrast to the military zone of the north and west, in which very little of Roman material culture is found in any context.¹⁵⁰

Another distinct cultural trend of the fourth century is the increasing use of military trappings by purely civilian offices. The military reforms of Diocletian and Constantine effected the final separation of civil and martial offices in the imperial government. One result of this divergence in roles was that many newly created civilian offices adopted militaristic dress, insignia and even title, perhaps seeking to hold on to that special prestige which had always been associated with military service in Roman society.¹⁵¹ It is possible that, as many of these new civil offices belonged to the central imperial administration, rather than local civic corporations, the imperial government may have sought to confer a sense of discipline and loyalty upon its new bureaucratic class by organizing, dressing and paying it in a fashion similar to the military. This adoption of Roman military trappings by a significant portion of the civilian aristocracy may partly explain the large number of Germanic belt-buckles, brooches and other personal ornaments excavated at villas throughout rural Britain.¹⁵² Earlier theories had postulated that, in an increasingly chaotic

countryside, wealthy landowners came to employ Germanic mercenaries as private security for their rural estates. Knowing now that Britain in the early to mid fourth century was in fact quite peaceful, and that wealthy officials had come to adopt military dress and insignia as part of their civil uniform, and that Germanic material culture was increasingly influencing Roman military dress, we can arrive upon an explanation for these finds which doesn't require the presence of large numbers of Germanic mercenaries throughout the country.

Non-elite cultural identities are harder to analyze, as they produce far less evidence in the archaeological record. However, a few inferences may be made from those goods that can be found at the more humble rural sites which dominate the British landscape. While the civil zone of Britain was a heavy consumer of Roman material culture and manufactured goods by the fourth century, the use of Roman goods does not necessarily signify a personal adoption or emulation of Roman culture itself. For example, the presence of Roman style pottery and dishware does not necessarily mean an adoption of aspects of Roman culture, but the presence of *mortaria*, the gritted clay mixing bowls ubiquitous to Roman kitchens, would suggest new, Latinized forms of cooking. These *mortaria* are most commonly found at military sites, in keeping with the strongly Romanized culture of the military. Found frequently, but in lesser volumes, in kitchens at villas and both elite and modest urban sites, *mortaria* are decidedly scarce at peasant sites, implying a certain rural conservatism in native diet.¹⁵³

In terms of dress and personal ornamentation, the rural population of Britain too seems to have retained its native habits. After the *Constitutio Antoniniana* granted Roman citizenship to every adult male in the Roman Empire in the early third century, the toga theoretically could have been worn by the entire male population of Britain. Despite this, it

seems to have never taken hold in Britain, either in the countryside or in towns, and is infrequently represented in British sculpture. While the toga may have been donned from time to time by businessmen and provincial elites for specific occasions and functions, it was never an item of daily wear. Rural Romano-British especially seem to have shunned the toga, instead choosing tunics and hooded, loose-fitting "Gallic" coats for their day-to-day wear.¹⁵⁴

One set of unmistakably Roman items that can be found at even the most humble of rural sites are "toilette instruments". Comprised of such items as tweezers, ear-spoons, combs, nail-cleaners, etc. these tools of personal hygiene were first imported into Britain after the Caesarean conquests of the first century CE, and were typically used by the increasingly Romanized Iron Age elites of the southeast. By the fourth century CE, these grooming tools can be found in an abundance of rural sites ranging from modest farmsteads to sprawling villas. Their popularity suggests that Roman concepts of appearance and grooming had taken a solid hold on the hearts and minds of the peasantry.¹⁵⁵

It is worth pointing out once more that trends in the civil zone were seldom reflected in the military zone. Despite a reluctance on the part of the rural population to adopt certain aspects of Roman culture, the peasantry of southern and eastern Britain was quantifiably more "Romanized" than rural Britons in the north and west, to say nothing of the villa elites or urban dwellers who themselves have virtually no counterparts in the military zone. This is an excellent example of the differing economies and governments of the two zones. In the civil zone access was allowed to a broad spectrum of Roman goods and ideas, and the population as a whole was allowed the means with which to acquire these goods and ideas. In the military zone the indigenous Britons had very little access to

Roman material culture, and moreover were seldom allowed to accumulate the wealth necessary to acquire it.

One of the most significant effects of the Roman Empire upon native British culture was the importation of new gods and new manners of worship. At the opening of the fourth century the Roman Empire was undergoing radical social and cultural transformations, most significantly in terms of religion. Despite the growing numbers of Christians on the Continent, Britain seems to have had only a very small Christian population at the beginning of the fourth century. In the Roman Empire Christianity was generally found in those urban areas which contained sizeable Jewish minorities, something which Britain lacked. Prior to the end of the third century CE, there seems to be little evidence for a significant Christian minority in Britain, much less an organized Christian church.¹⁵⁶ In fact, the late third and early fourth centuries seem to have been an era of marked prosperity for paganism in Britain, with many new temples and shrines built throughout the countryside.¹⁵⁷ Whether this was due to an upswing in the religiosity of the Romano-British or was simply part of the trend of rural building that marked the early fourth century is unclear, but paganism was a powerful cultural force in Britain at the beginning of the fourth century.

“Paganism” in Britain in the later Roman Empire was typified by the worship of an array of gods, goddesses, nymphs, wood spirits and local and personal deities. While there were a few specifically Greco-Roman and Latin cults to be found in Britain, many deities worshipped in fourth century Britain were hybrid Romano-Celtic beings, gods and goddesses who shared traits and characteristics of both indigenous Celtic belief and those of Classical Mediterranean myth. In a process known as *interpretatio*, incoming Roman soldiers and settlers would graft the gods of Greco-Roman myth onto local deities they

perceived as sharing certain characteristics with their Mediterranean gods. In some cases this resulted in the pairing of native names for deities with those of the Roman gods thought to be most similar to them.¹⁵⁸ Sulis Minerva, Apollo Cunomaglos (Hound-Lord), Mercury Andescociuoucus ("Great Activator") and Mars Rigonometos (King-of-the-Grove) are just a few examples of this name-pairing. Across Britain there was a great deal of variance in religious practice and in the deities worshipped, and as with most other socio-cultural issues in Britain, the nature of religious practice depended upon who one was and what part of Britain in which one happened to live.

The most conservative of all social groups in fourth century Britain with regards to religion was the Roman military. This is not surprising given the importance the military placed upon instilling a spirit of a common, Latinate martial culture in its recruits. The military was therefore far more likely than other social groups to worship classical deities without regard to *interpretatio*, with devotion to Mars, Minerva, Apollo, Diana, the deified Hercules and of course Jupiter Optimus Maximus widely attested to in the archaeological record through both inscriptions and offerings. The military community in Britain was also the stronghold of such specifically Roman cults as the cult of Sol Invictus ("The Unconquerable Sun") and the cult of the Imperial *numen*, that divine spirit which was thought to move through each Roman Emperor.¹⁵⁹

Despite the strongly traditional character of the Roman military in Britain, there exists plentiful evidence that the rank-and-file soldiers of the army worshipped an array of deities in addition to the classical Greco-Roman pantheon as recruits from every corner of the Empire and beyond brought the gods and goddesses of their homelands with them into the Roman army. Specifically local deities were worshipped as well in the form of *numinae loci*, local spirits, such as water nymphs and woodland gods as well as the *genii*,

or inherent characters of peoples and places. Thus we see the soldiers from the legionary fort at Carrawburgh dedicating inscriptions to the nymph Coventina, who presided over the spring which provided their fort with drinking water¹⁶⁰, as well as an altar dedicated to Brigantia, the spirit of North Britain, set up at a fort at Birrens in southern Scotland.¹⁶¹ Despite its overall conservatism, religious practice in the Roman military remained as varied as the peoples from whom it drew its soldiers.

If the religious practices of the military may be described as more or less traditionally “Roman”, it is only in comparison to the nature of worship among the broader Romano-British civil community. Although by the fourth century there was widespread adoption of Roman manners of worship and conceptions of the divine, religious sentiment in Britain had far older roots that stretched back long before the arrival of the Romans, and pre-Roman religion continued to play a significant role in the lives of the Romano-British. Religion in Britain prior to the coming of Rome was a distinctly different entity from what it became under the influence of classical Roman culture. The gods of pre-Roman Britain were less anthropomorphized, and were less likely to be depicted in representational art. In contrast to the Greco-Roman pantheon the Brythonic gods themselves seem to have had less striking individual characteristics, and their spheres of influence were less clearly defined. Nonetheless, there exist a few identifiable deities in Britain, although their specific characteristics and roles can only be guessed at. There seems to have been a martial “high god”, who may have been considered a chief deity and is often related to Mars or Mercury by Roman observers. There was a horned god, sometimes called Cerunnos, who sported deer-like antlers on his head, and whose cult still survived in the fourth century as well a rider-god, a god associated with wheels, as well as numerous

twinned and triad deities, the latter of which may have been similar to the *deae matres*, the tripartite mother-goddesses whose worship was common along the Rhineland.¹⁶²

The gods themselves seem to have largely survived the arrival of Roman culture in Britain, and while the process of *interpretatio* twinned Celtic and Latin names together and grafted certain Roman features onto the indigenous gods, this process should not be exaggerated in its extent. Of the 246 surviving inscriptions dedicated to the gods found in Britain which date to the Roman period, 169 give only the Celtic name of the god, without any association with a Greco-Roman deity. A further 12 give either Latin or Celtic names, without pairing them with an indigenous or Roman counterpart. Only 65 specifically twin Celtic and Latin names together, representing only 26% of all surviving inscriptions of the names of the gods from the Roman period.¹⁶³ It is significant that the evidence for the worship of the hybrid Romano-Celtic gods produced by *interpretatio* is found far more frequently in urban contexts than in rural ones, suggesting that rural religion remained relatively conservative and traditional, with urban populations more willing and able to graft aspects of Roman worship onto their own religious practices.¹⁶⁴ While the gods of pre-Roman Britain may have taken on certain Greco-Roman aspects such as a clearer delineation of functions, and a more classical representation in art, the majority of the Romano-British were worshipping the same gods as their Iron Age ancestors.

One defining characteristic of Celtic Iron Age worship that survived into Roman times was the depositing of votive goods into sources of water. In Celtic belief, water was seen as having specifically supernatural qualities, and may have been perceived as a gateway to the Other world. Springs in particular held special reverence, as their constantly flowing waters were seen as symbolizing the renewal of life and spirit in the world.¹⁶⁵ In pre-Roman Britain items such as coins, weapons, shields, slave-chains and sacrificial

victims all were deposited in the lakes, rivers and marshes of the British landscape.¹⁶⁶ This practice continued into the Roman period, but with a decidedly Latin twist. Found at sites across Britain but with a particular concentration at the shrine to Sulis Minerva at Bath are the *defixiones*, or curse tablets. Deposited in the waters underneath the springs, the *defixiones* found at Bath offer a glimpse into the ritualistic and superstitious nature of Romano-British religion. Utilizing highly legalistic, ritualized language, these lead tablets are inscribed with supplications and exhortations seeking the return of stolen goods, the restitution of personal honor and the inflicting of physical and spiritual torment upon transgressors.¹⁶⁷ This is a distinctly Roman practice, involving not just literacy but also highlighting the essentially contractual nature of the relationship between the people of the Roman Empire and their gods. Their deposition into lakes, ponds, wells and springs is a decidedly Celtic twist upon a quintessential Roman custom.

It is worth noting once again that the bulk of our evidence for Romano-British paganism has largely neglected the indigenous civilian communities of the military zone. This is indicative of the essentially invisible nature of religious practice in the military zone outside the installations of the Roman military itself. Neither temples, nor votive plaques or any artistic representation of spirits or gods exist from the rural communities of the far north and west of Britain. Only evidence of votive deposits into rivers and bogs exists from the military zone during the Roman period, reflecting a simple continuity from pre-Roman religious rites. This invisibility of religious practice likely has as much to do with the material poverty of the communities within the military zone as much as any innate conservatism in religious sentiment.¹⁶⁸

The most significant development in religious practice in Britain in the fourth century was undoubtedly the arrival of Christianity. At the beginning of the century Britain

lacked a sizeable Christian community, and it was at this time that the numbers of pagan temples, in both rural and urban contexts, reached their peak. However in 314, just two years after Constantine's adoption of the Christian faith, three British bishops and one priest were dispatched to Arles to partake in a religious debate, suggesting either that an archaeologically invisible Christian community was already present in Britain, or that the diocese quickly acquired a Christian church.¹⁶⁹

The earliest physical evidence for the presence of a Christian community in Britain comes from a collection of silver plate excavated in 1975 near the town of Chesterton. In the fourth century this was the Roman settlement of Durobrivae. The find itself consisted of nine silver vessels and eighteen votive plaques buried in the earth, with both the vessels and the plaques bearing Christian symbols and phraseology typical of the late third and early fourth centuries. One piece bears the word *altare*, meaning "sanctuary" and is indicative of a distinctly Christian conception of divine power. A silver bowl bears the inscription "Innocentia and Viventia present this vessel to Christ" around its rim, while another is inscribed with the *chi-ro* symbol as well as the Greek letters alpha and omega.¹⁷⁰ The most intriguing aspect to this buried hoard of silver is the uncertainty over its age, with estimates placing it anywhere from the late third to the late fourth century. If it can indeed be placed in the late third century, this would suggest the presence of a sophisticated and wealthy Christian community well before Constantine's edict of toleration in 313.¹⁷¹

While the evidence suggests that Britain had only an insignificant Christian community before the fourth century, this was soon to change. When Constantine at last claimed victory over his final opponent and assumed total control of the Western Empire in 324, the fortunes of Christianity began to rise. Prior to this, Constantine had associated himself both with the cult of Christ as well as that of Sol Invictus, perhaps seeking to

appease both the growing Christian community of Rome and the conservative pagan factions of Roman politics. After 324 however, Constantine threw his considerable power and support fully behind the Christian faith, and Christianity replaced the Capitoline Triad (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva) as the official religion of the imperial government.¹⁷²

The effects of the legitimization of Christianity soon become apparent in the archaeological record. Christian burials, generally identifiable by a lack of grave goods, an east-west orientation of the body, and lead-lined coffins become more and more commonplace from the early fourth century on. Furthermore, the very practice of burials began to change as Christian conceptions of the dead began to overtake the older pagan customs. A hallmark feature of the pagan urban landscape of the early Empire was the presence of cemeteries along the roadsides, well outside the city limits. In pagan cosmology, the dead were considered dangerous and unclean, and had to be kept away from the spaces of the living.¹⁷³ Under Christianity the dead came to be considered holy, and as urban temples were transformed into the earliest Christian churches, burials inside the city limits became commonplace as the newfound Christian communities sought to bury their dead upon sacred ground. In Britain the towns of Isca Dumnoni (Exeter) and Lindum (Lincoln) began burying their dead in the fora of their town centers, continuing the widespread trend of reutilizing disused public buildings, while in Camulodunum (Colchester) a Christian Church with an attached cemetery was established in the heart of the town, practices which would have been unconscionable in earlier times.¹⁷⁴

One result of the imperial government subsidizing the Christian faith was that Christianity now came to be viewed as a sure path towards imperial favor. With Christianity the official religion of the Roman state, its adoption became a shrewd career

choice for ambitious aristocrats. To be a Christian was to publicly proclaim one's loyalty to the Emperor and the Imperial state.¹⁷⁵

In an effort to both undermine the power and influence of the old pagan cults as well as to enrich the fledgling Christian Church, the Emperor Constantine began after 324 to strip the old pagan temples of their wealth and landed property and transferred them to Church authorities. This was a massive project undertaken across the Empire, and could only have been executed with the support and participation of the ruling classes of Roman society. The case was no different in Britain, and the second quarter of the fourth century saw the widespread divestment of the pagan temples and shrines across the countryside. Interestingly enough, little of this wealth seems to have made its way to the British Church. When in 359 three British bishops were sent to a Church council at Ariminum they were forced to seek secular funding for their journey, suggesting that the Romano-British Church was not exactly bursting with funds. Moreover, there is a distinct lack of grand church-building in Britain when compared to the lavish centers built on the Continent.¹⁷⁶ The question remains as to where the divested riches of the old pagan cults went. One possible answer to this question lies in the ever expanding wealth of the provincial aristocracy of Britain. The tremendous prosperity of rural Britain has already been examined in detail; the period immediately following Constantine's policy of pagan divestment saw the greatest flowering of villa and townhouse expansion and mosaic construction across Britain. The implication is that of the wealth confiscated from the pagan temples may have found its way into the pockets of the increasingly Christian Romano-British aristocracy.¹⁷⁷

The Christianization of Britain did not happen overnight of course, and paganism remained a powerful cultural force all the way to the end of the fourth century. After pagan

temples were prohibited within city limits in 341, the construction of new centers of pagan worship merely moved to the countryside.¹⁷⁸ In 367 an impressive temple was built within the old Iron Age hillfort at Maiden Castle, a relatively remote location and one which raises interesting questions as to the continuity of pagan belief in Britain.¹⁷⁹ Across Britain there is evidence of vigorous activity at pagan sites throughout the fourth century, while in western Britain there was widespread construction of rural pagan shrines from the mid-fourth century on.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, despite the apparent embrace of Christianity by the Romano-British aristocracy, the evidence of heartfelt Christian faith is minimal. The explosion of mid-fourth century mosaics at elite residences might be expected to display overtly Christian themes, yet explicit Christian symbolism is almost wholly lacking in these mosaics, and where it does occur, it is often in the context of pagan allegory.

Final Thoughts on the Golden Age

Britain in the middle of the fourth century was a place of diverse economies, cultures and societies, one that had been radically transformed in the space of just a few generations. The political infrastructure of the island had been completely remade, while the religious passions of its people were undergoing revolutionary changes. Despite this, the provincial economy was at the height of its strength and prosperity as the result both of a lessening in the demands placed upon it by the military as well as a reorganization of economic and commercial activity away from the urban centers and out to the small towns and farms of the countryside. Much of what is considered today to be quintessentially Roman British had its flowering during this period: villas and villa economies, rich artistic production, rural industry and religious expression both pagan and Christian all reached new heights of creativity and prosperity in the first half of the fourth century.

This wealth and stability must be kept in mind when considering the radical changes which Britain was to endure in the coming decades. If the first half of the fourth century may be termed a “Golden Age”, the second half was a time of upheaval and chaos, as the increasing instability of the imperial machine began at last to be felt on Britain’s shores. Imperial pretenders, religious intolerance, political violence and economic crisis all would visit Britain in the coming decades to one extent or another, to the effect that only a little over a century after Constantine the Great was proclaimed Emperor at Eboracum, Britain was to leave the Empire forever.

Crises and Secession: Britain 337-409

When Constantine the Great died in 337 CE the brief era of stability came to a close. Despite the provisions for the succession of *Augusti* laid down by Diocletian, personal ambition and infighting plunged the Roman Empire into three months of political turmoil. When the dust had settled, three men claimed the title of Augustus: Constans, Constantius II and Constantine II, all sons of Constantine I. Each man carved off a piece of the Empire as his own personal domain, with Constans holding Italy, Africa and Illyria, Constantius in possession of Constantinople and most of the Eastern Empire and Constantine II controlling Spain, Gaul and Britain. This unequal division of power could not stand, of course, and Constantine II soon launched an invasion of the Continent in an effort to dislodge his brother Constans from Italy. The invasion proved to be a failure, and Constantine was killed at the battle of Aqueleia in 340.¹⁸¹

This marked the first time since the overthrow of Allectus by Constantius I in 296 that Britain had violently lost an imperial benefactor. One possible result of Constantine II’s defeat was a further weakening of the garrison in Britain. It is uncertain how many

troops Constantine took with him from Britain when he marched to war against his brother, but a substantial diminution of the British garrison may be inferred from the mid-winter visit of Constans in 342 in order to oversee yet another sequence of defensive construction at towns and cities across Britain. If a substantial number of troops had been pulled from the province and subsequently slain in battle on the Continent the remaining troops may have been insufficient to defend the frontiers. If this was indeed the case it would make sense to ensure that the urban centers of Britain were as heavily fortified as possible.¹⁸²

Despite the defeat of Constantine II, Britain seems to have experienced little political turmoil immediately following his death. Britain's situation as an isolated diocese at the northern end of the Empire spared it the worst of the violence that frequently plagued the Continent. However, events were soon to unfold which would finally bring the political violence and paranoia of the era to Britain's shores and would spell the beginning of the end of its "Golden Age". In 350 a new usurper appeared on the scene in the person of Flavius Magnus Magnentius, an imperial officer who masterminded a conspiracy against Constantine. After murdering Constantine at Autun, Magnentius was proclaimed Emperor by his troops and soon went about solidifying his position. In the ensuing political chaos, two further *Augusti* were proclaimed across the western Empire, but were soon defeated by Magnentius, who commanded two of the western field armies.

In a manner similar to Carausius' efforts during the Gallic Empire, Magnentius began minting his own coins soon after seizing power. Unlike Carausius, whose coinage was heavily influenced by classical mythology, the imagery on the coins of Magnentius is overwhelmingly Christian, demonstrating how far the culture of the Empire had changed in a mere sixty years. The Christian god was now associated with the divine mission of the imperial office, rather than that of the Capitoline triad. Nonetheless, the message was

largely the same: namely that the current Augustus (whoever that happened to be) enjoyed the backing and protection of the divine.

In an effort to bolster his martial and material resources Magnentius began heavily taxing the British aristocracy, tapping into the tremendous wealth accumulated by the provincial elites over the previous decades. Furthermore despite the Christian symbolism employed in his currency, Magnentius himself was a pagan, descended from Germanic *laeti*, and he extended tolerance to fellow pagans across the western Empire. Only nine years prior to his usurpation Magnentius' predecessor and victim Constans had outlawed pagan worship within city limits. By allowing pagans to worship openly once more in the urban centers of the western Empire, Magnentius may have been an appealing choice as Emperor to the more conservative elements of the British aristocracy.

In 353 Magnentius marched to Illyria to meet the invading armies of the Eastern Augustus Constantius II. Defeated in battle, he fled to Gaul, where he met defeat a second time and was compelled to commit suicide shortly thereafter. The repercussions of his defeat in Britain were severe. Upon Magnentius' defeat Constantius, a deeply Christian man and a vociferous opponent of paganism, dispatched a Hispanic agent named Paulus to Britain to root out former supporters of Magnentius' regime. Paulus proved to be particularly ruthless in uncovering sedition both real and imagined, and began to systematically extort the British landed classes of their wealth. So fearsome was his reputation that he earned the nickname "Paulus Catenas", or "Paul the Chain". Once in Britain, this implacable imperial agent soon extended his mission and began a campaign of political terror. Seeking to purge Britain of political dissent and pagan sympathizers, Paulus leveled wild accusations of treason and corruption, arresting and imprisoning unknown numbers of people from all walks of life. In particular Paulus focused his efforts

upon the gentry of Britain, imprisoning many on false charges of treason and confiscating their wealth and property. The depredations of Paulus signaled the beginning of the end of Britain's fourth century prosperity. From this time forward, the construction of elite residences in town and country became more infrequent, and the urban centers of Britain begin to exhibit a steep decline in prosperity.¹⁸³

From the middle of the century on, there is evidence that Christianity in Britain came to be adopted by a larger and larger segment of the population. Rural Christianity in particular seems to have grown during this period, as is suggested by a decline in the number of pagan statuary and votive offerings at rural sites across Britain. Further evidence for this growth of rural Christianity is attested to by a number of lead basins dateable to this period found at villa sites across Britain. Generally inscribed with Christian symbolism, it is thought that these tanks served as portable baptismal fonts for a travelling clergy. The frequency with which they are found at villas suggests that from the mid-fourth century on the residences of the landed gentry may have been used as places of worship by rural Christians.¹⁸⁴

Paganism remained a vital cultural force, however, and evidence exists for continued pagan worship into the late fourth century and beyond¹⁸⁵, with a final phase of pagan temple construction occurring from 360-380 in the west of Britain.¹⁸⁶ Evidence for the deliberate destruction of the baptismal fonts and their deposition in wells and springs across the British countryside is evocative of the ancient Iron Age practice of placing offerings to gods and spirits in watery contexts, suggesting that even self-identified Christians may have held onto at least some of their ancestor's religious beliefs.¹⁸⁷ Nonetheless, although pagan temples remained in use throughout fourth century Britain, they show evidence of declining activity by the end of the fourth century.¹⁸⁸

After the departure of Paulus, Britain was to enjoy only a brief respite before trouble once again came to its shores. In the winter of 360 the Emperor Julian dispatched his *magister equitum* to Britain along with four field army units in order to deal with increasing raids by *Picti* from across the northern frontier and *Scotti* and *Attacotti* from Hibernia (Ireland). Few specifics are known, but the fact that four units were drawn from Julian's elite *comitatus* and sent across the sea in mid-winter suggests a very serious situation. The events of the winter of 360 were however but a hint of the calamity that was to strike Britain in 367, which saw an unprecedented coordinated assault by a number of barbarian peoples. Known to history as the *barbarica conspiratio*, this "Barbarian Conspiracy" involved a tremendous number of enemy combatants and an unusually high level of cooperation and planning by Rome's enemies. While *Picti* stormed across the northern frontier *Scottic* and *Attacottic* raiders landed on the west coasts of Britain, raiding deep into the interior. Additionally, and most ominously, *Saxones* from the north coasts of Germania began assaulting the southern and eastern coasts of Britain, doing great damage to the coastal communities. These disparate barbarian elements wreaked tremendous havoc upon Britain, pillaging the countryside and killing two senior Roman officers in battle, including the *dux Britanniarum*, the most senior military officer in Britain. Although the raiders were ultimately defeated and driven from Britain in 369, the damage wrought was tremendous, and the unified attack by four ethnically distinct and geographically far-flung barbarian peoples suggests an unprecedented level of strategic planning on the part of Rome's northern enemies.¹⁸⁹

Following the devastation of the war Britain required extensive rebuilding and refortification of its defenses. Hadrian's Wall was extensively repaired, and a series of coastal watchtowers were constructed along the northeastern shores. Cities and towns that

had suffered at the hands of the invaders had their defenses rebuilt and strengthened and additional troops were provided both for the frontiers as well as the city garrisons.

However, these repairs were still incomplete when in 383 misfortune again struck Britain in the form of yet another imperial pretender by the name of Magnus Maximus. A career soldier, Maximus was serving in Britain as either a *comes* or *dux* when he rebelled against the western Augustus Gratian in response to a perceived diplomatic slight. He soon stripped Britain of a substantial number of soldiers, many of whom would have been recent posts to the diocese as part of the restoration of Britain in the 370s, and departed for Gaul to press his claim to the imperial throne.¹⁹⁰

Maximus did not leave Britain wholly undefended, however, and made a number of unusual provisions for his absence which would have far reaching historical consequences. Before leaving for Gaul, Maximus brokered a number of treaties placing responsibility for local defense with the chieftains of the western coasts of Britain in order to free up additional troops for his gamble on the continent. As the west coast lay almost entirely outside the civil of Britain and its high degree of Romanization, the local tribes remained largely unchanged in character from the Iron Age. It was with the indigenous aristocrats of these communities that Maximus negotiated the defenses of Britain, charging individual chiefs with the defense of the western shores in the absence of Roman troops. The withdrawal of these troops was likely greeted with relief, if not outright joy, by the local tribes who had endured the constant heavy hand of the Roman military in every facet of their lives. Their gratitude to Maximus is attested in Welsh folklore, in which Magnus Maximus is remembered as Maccsen Wledig, "Prince Maximus", and is described as the best of Roman emperors, while the early medieval kings of Dyfed in southwest Wales

counted the investiture of their ancestors with military authority by "Maxim Guletic" as marking the foundation of their dynasty.¹⁹¹

Once in Gaul, Maximus enjoyed greater success than his predecessors, instigating the murder of Gratian by his own *magister militum*. A period of détente followed, after which Maximus made his move against the Eastern Empire and its emperor Theodosius I "The Great". Theodosius ultimately defeated and killed Maximus at the battle of Aquileia in 388, after which he seems to have had little inclination in renewing the garrisons of Britain, and instead sent a only small task force of *comitatensian* troops to secure the diocese following his victory. For the remainder of his reign Theodosius was primarily concerned with developments in the east and the growing threat of the Germanic nations, in particular that of the Goths, who had crossed the Danube frontier in 376 and annihilated a Roman field army in Thrace only two years later.¹⁹² With the military resources of the Empire stretched thin, the defense of Britain receded into the background of imperial priorities.¹⁹³

By the death of Theodosius in 395, Britain had regained a measure of the stability, if not the prosperity, of earlier eras, and the diocese remained firmly within the Roman Empire. Despite periodic raiding by barbarian peoples, the security of Britain had not been seriously threatened since the Barbarian Conspiracy of 367-369, and although Britain was not as prosperous as it once had been, the economy was not in shambles either, and life for the average rural peasant was likely little different at the end of the century from what it had been at the start. The ruling classes of Britain maintained firm ties with the imperial government at Trier, and Roman law and the Roman way of life remained firmly established. Yet just fourteen years after the death of Theodosius, Britain left the Roman Empire forever.

Upon the death of Theodosius the Empire was divided between his two sons, Honorius and Arcadius, who controlled the Western and Eastern Empires respectively. However, true power in the West now laid in the hands of the *magister militum* Flavius Stilicho, a man of Germanic descent, who now had total command over the military forces of the entire Western Empire. Following Theodosius' death, Stilicho was soon forced to intervene in the defense of Britain. The small force of *comitatenses* left in Britain in the wake of Maximus' revolt was withdrawn in 398, only to have its absence capitalized on by a fresh round of barbarian incursions. Stilicho responded by landing in Britain with a sizeable field army, only to withdraw from Britain the following year, taking many of these troops with him. Stilicho would have been well aware of the increasingly precarious nature of the defense of the Western Empire, and he may have been seeking to keep as many troops as possible on the Continent to deal with future barbarian incursions.

Stilicho's stripping of troops from Britain is evidenced in two ways. The *Notitia Dignitatum*, a late fourth century listing of military posts and commands, indicates that a number of units formerly stationed in Britain were now serving on the Continent, both in the East as well as the West. While this evidence is somewhat open to interpretation, since it is unclear as to when exactly these units were removed from Britain, much more telling is the sudden drop-off in coin finds in Britain after 402. While Londinium had possessed a working mint throughout the fourth century, the last time it was in use was under the rule of Magnus Maximus in the 380s. By 400, it was no longer functioning, and all coinage would have been imported from the Continent. The last series of coins found in the archaeological record in Britain are those of Honorius and Arcadius, the very latest of which were minted in 402. As coins were shipped in bulk to the provinces primarily in order to pay the salaries of the military, the sudden lack of new currency in Britain

suggests that there were no longer sufficient numbers of soldiers in the diocese to warrant official shipments of coin, although the presence of Germanic mercenaries, paid in land or kind, might be another possible explanation. It is also possible that the Western Empire had simply become too cash-poor by this point and had stopped paying its troops in Britain. Whichever the case may be, it indicates a seriously unstable situation in Britain in the early fifth century.¹⁹⁴

It may have been this stoppage of payment that led the remaining troops in Britain to revolt once more. In 406 they proclaimed as Emperor an officer named Marcus, though he was murdered shortly thereafter. In 407 a man named Gratian took his place, only to be murdered himself after a mere four months in power. He was replaced by a soldier of lofty ambition who named himself, appropriately, as Constantine III, who immediately organized an assault upon the Western Empire.¹⁹⁵ This indicates that there were sufficient troops remaining in Britain for someone to be able to seriously contemplate using them for an invasion. Certainly there would have had to have been *comitatensian* troops still in Britain, as it is hard to conceive of even a wildly optimistic soldier considering an invasion utilizing only *limitanei* troops.

While this latest revolt was unfolding, far more catastrophic events were developing on the Continent. On New Year's Eve in 406 a massive horde of Germanic migrants crossed the frozen Rhine into Gaul. Comprised of both warriors and refugees of many nations, including *Vandals*, *Alans*, and *Suevi*, these invaders presented an military crisis of the most serious magnitude.¹⁹⁶ Stilicho immediately organized the defense of Italy, but seems to have been reluctant to extend his military resources in Gaul. As a result, these Germanic invaders were allowed to rampage across the whole of northern Gaul, sacking cities and towns and pillaging freely across the countryside, wreaking such

devastation that the Gallo-Roman poet Orientus wrote that "All Gaul was filled with the smoke of a single funeral pyre".¹⁹⁷

While the initial revolt in Britain broke out in the months preceding the Rhine crossing, there can be no doubt that the violence and chaos across the Channel did not influence the development of the rebellion. With the breakdown of Roman authority in the Gallic countryside following the invasion, fears of seaborne raiding along the southern coasts of Britain by Germanic pirates would have been renewed. Furthermore, the barbarian invasion led to the withdrawal of the imperial bureaucracy from Trier and its reinstatement at Arles, a move which greatly distanced Britain from the central government upon which it depended for funds and administrators.¹⁹⁸ When Constantine crossed the Channel in the spring of 407, his first priority was to secure the northern coasts of Gaul and to unite his rebel army with the remnants of Roman military forces scattered across the land. By the end of the year Constantine had prevailed not only over the Germanic invaders, who were forced to turn south towards Gallia Aquitania and Hispania, but also against the forces of the central government. Stilicho was therefore forced to concede Gaul to Constantine, who was subsequently recognized as co-Augustus by Honorius in 409.¹⁹⁹

The year 409 would see a number of events that would prove disastrous for both Britain and the Empire as a whole. It was in this year that Stilicho was outmaneuvered by rival factions within the Western Senate, and was deposed, arrested and murdered by parties alarmed at his tremendous personal power.²⁰⁰ That same year Constantine's hold upon Gaul, Hispania and Britain began to crumble as the government of Honorius launched a new offensive against him. Plagued by treachery and infighting amongst his officers, Constantine ultimately found himself trapped and besieged at his capital in Arles,

which cut Britain off from both Constantine's government and that of Honorius. This meant that the distribution of imperial finances no longer flowed into British coffers: any soldiers who still were receiving pay would have seen their salaries cut off at this point, as well as the imperial bureaucrats who made up the government of the British diocese. Fresh barbarian incursions from across the Rhine began to devastate northern Gaul once more, endangering the Channel coast and resurrecting the threat of Continental barbarian raids into Britain. In 409 renewed raiding by *Picti*, *Scotti* and *Saxones* plagued Britain's shores and threw the diocese into chaos. This final crisis is referenced by the Roman historian Zosimus:

The barbarians across the Rhine attacked everywhere with all their strength, and brought the people of Britain and some of the nations of Gaul to the point where they revolted from Roman rule and lived by themselves, no longer obeying Roman laws. The Britons took up arms and, fighting for themselves, freed the cities from barbarian pressure...expelling the Roman officials and setting up their own administration as well as they could.²⁰¹

The "Roman officials" expelled from Britain were likely Constantian loyalists, Gallo-Roman administrators sent to Britain by Constantine after he had taken control of the Gallic prefecture, rather than native born Romano-British aristocrats.²⁰² Yet the question of who exactly rebelled and threw out the Constantian administration remains unclear. One possible answer is that the rebellion had its origins in the upper-classes of Roman Britain, who acted in 409 in order to eject the military and civil officers of a failed imperial regime, as well as to free themselves from the burden of imperial taxation and bureaucratic expenses. With the apparent collapse of Constantine's government in 409, keeping his former administrators on hand may have seemed like an unnecessary liability, and their expulsion may have been intended to deflect future government reprisals, with bitter memories of Paulus Catenas and his purge still lingering in the public consciousness. Additionally, the imperial government had been making increasingly heavy demands upon

the estates of the landed aristocracy in Britain, as the mounting crises of the late fourth century stretched imperial coffers to their limits. With tax revenues from Gaul declining, and the military expenditures of the Roman state climbing ever higher, the taxation of the British diocese became increasingly severe.²⁰³ Furthermore, the demands of the military itself were weighing ever more heavily upon the finances of the landed gentry, who were obligated to provide a certain number of men from their estates for military service each year, putting a constant drain upon the manpower available to work their farms.²⁰⁴ Faced with a bleak economic future under Rome, the aristocrats of Britain may have thought it better to face the fifth century without the crushing costs of imperial government.

Another possibility is that the anti-imperial rebellion of 409 had its roots in the lower classes of Roman Britain. This scenario posits that Britain was affected by a violent social movement similar to the *bacaudae*. The *bacaudae* were a group of bandits and rebels with primarily lower-class origins active in northern Gaul in the late fourth and early fifth centuries who took up arms in response to the increasingly oppressive demands made upon them by the imperial government. Heavy taxation was felt more acutely by the lower classes than by the landed elites, and military conscription, though odious to both, took a heavy human toll on the rural poor. The social and economic situation in Britain in the early fifth century was not dissimilar to that in Gaul in the late fourth, and it is possible to view the rebellion of 409 as a popular response to the burdensome demands of a foreign imperial bureaucracy.²⁰⁵

Whoever initiated the events of 409, the final push to break with Rome lay in the new wave of barbarian attacks which struck Britain at that time. Cut off from the collapsing government of Constantine III and possessing only limited military resources, the people of Britain would have been forced to defend themselves as best they could,

likely through the hiring of foreign mercenaries. Federate Germanic troops would have been commonplace in the Roman military of the early fifth century, and it is possible that the wealthy classes of Britain dug deep into their pockets to provide for the protection of their estates. If their defense was successful, as it would appear to have been, this may have caused certain segments of Romano-British society to question the need for the Roman military and its attached imperial bureaucracy. The hiring of mercenaries may simply have been cheaper than paying for an entire imperial government apparatus, especially when that imperial government appeared incapable of defending the citizens from whom it demanded so much.

Few people in Britain would have recognized the year 409 as the one in which their diocese left the Roman Empire forever. Despite several decades of political upheaval, the Roman imperial government was not seriously jeopardized in any way, at least no more so than it had been during the Crisis of the Third Century, and Roman culture itself was in no way threatened in Britain in the early fifth century. Cities continued to function, and their continued importance is underlined by the extensions and additions made to their walls all the way until the end of the fourth century. Yet, by the sixth century, all these hallmarks of Romano-British life had vanished, or existed in a radically altered or diminished form. The reasons for this lay in the nature of the relationship of Britain to the Roman state. Roman life depended upon a monetary economy for its existence, an economy which itself depended upon the Roman state for its regulation and prosperity. Without the Roman state, the market economy of Britain soon ceased to function, and as it died, so too did many critical aspects of Roman culture and society. Britain in 409 stood on the brink of a new world, one which is harder for us to visualize, but is no less vibrant and fascinating.



The Gallic Prefecture in 400 CE. Wickham, Chris. *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*. London, Penguin Books 2010, pg. xiv

Fragmentation: Britain in the Fifth Century

Following the expulsion of the Roman administration, Britain began its transition from Antiquity into the early Medieval era. The century following the end of the Roman government in Britain has often been lamented as a time when the refined civilization of the Classical era was obliterated by chaos and invasion and replaced by barbarous societies that were only dimly aware of the world that came before them. In Britain the two hundred years between the collapse of the Roman administration and the arrival of the evangelizing mission of St. Augustine have been described as the “Lost Centuries”²⁰⁶, a Dark Age, characterized by a lack of written evidence and thus largely invisible to historians. Gaps such as this in the historical record tend to be filled by myths, and this is particularly true

of the time between the fall of Rome and the Christianization of Britain's Germanic kings, the era of Arthur and Merlin, when history and legend become inseparably intertwined.

While a serious inquiry into the Arthur myth is beyond the scope of this paper, I will seek to dispel two commonly held myths of this era and which are inextricably linked with each other. The first is that the social institutions of the Roman world disappeared entirely in the early fifth century, and that Latin culture was swiftly replaced by an illiterate, warrior society as the dormant Celtic culture of the Romano-British resurfaced following the collapse of the Roman state.²⁰⁷ The second myth, which is often taken to be the cause of the first, is that from the early fifth century eastern Britain came under increasing assault by various North Sea peoples, collectively called "Anglo-Saxons", who invaded Britain in great numbers and drove out, enslaved or exterminated the Romano-British population. In the wake of this widespread devastation, the countryside of Britain would have reverted to forest and wasteland as these Germanic peoples carved out territories for their respective tribes, territories that would coalesce to form the first Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.²⁰⁸ Taken together these two myths present a picture of Britain at the beginning of the sixth century as divided between a Christian Celtic northwest and a pagan Germanic southeast, with a distinct line of separation between the two running down the center of the island, and virtually nothing of the Roman past remaining to shape either society.

This division mirrors the traditional military/civil zone divide of Romano-British history. Although profound differences existed between the former military and civil zones of Britain in the post-Roman period, there were significant cultural and political variations within them as well. In order to produce as accurate an account as possible of the transformations of society and culture in Britain during this time, both of these

geographical zones will be explored in turn, in the hope of addressing the question as to whether or not there was a meaningful continuity of Roman culture in Britain beyond the fifth century.

The South and East

Military and Political Institutions

The rebellion of 409 did not signal a rejection of Roman culture, or even of Roman forms of governance. Rather, it was a rebellion against the imperial regime of Constantine III and his administration. The Roman “officials” mentioned by Zosimus as being expelled by the British were the Gallo-Roman diocesan administrators installed by Constantine after his cooption of the praefectorian state apparatus in Gaul. These men would have been viewed as foreigners, and easy targets for a population weary of war and resentful of rapacious imperial bureaucrats. After their expulsion, there seems to have been no attempt to recreate the diocesan government on the part of the Romano-British aristocracy, and the governance of Britain was divided up amongst the various *civitates*.²⁰⁹ In 410, the Western Emperor Honorius sent an open letter to these cities, telling them to “look to their own defenses”, likely in the face of continuing raids by *Picti*, *Scotti* and *Saxones*. The letter itself, known as the “Rescript of Honorius”, is in the form of a reply, implying that there may have been an appeal by certain elements in Britain for the return of the imperial government, or perhaps only its military forces. The fact that Honorius addressed the letter to the “*civitates*”, rather than any diocesan or even provincial authority suggests an almost immediate disintegration of the Roman state apparatus in Britain.²¹⁰ This does, however, imply that the *curia* of the late Empire may have been revived. With the removal of the imperial bureaucrats who had co-opted so much of their prestige, the curial classes of

Britain may have renewed their city governments, now that they were once more in a position of influence.

The defenses organized by the cities of Britain can only be estimated. In the wake of Constantine's bid for power in Gaul, there cannot have been many regular troops left in Britain. Certainly most, if not all, of the field army units went to the war on the Continent, leaving only the *limitanei* on Hadrian's Wall in the north and the Saxon Shore forts in the south. This leaves two options as to the nature of armed defense in Britain in the fifth century: local militias or mercenary troops. In southern Britain, there may have been substantial numbers of Germanic mercenaries left behind following the expulsion of Constantine's administrators. Some may have returned to the Continent, but it is possible that others stayed behind in the employ of civic officials. While the use of Germanic mercenaries to fight Germanic invaders may seem a questionable strategy, the utilization of barbarians to fight other barbarian groups had a long history in the Roman military, and the increasing Germanization of the Roman army over the course of the fourth century has been well attested. By the fifth century a number of prominent Germanic tribes had become extensively Romanized in their culture. Tribes such as the *Alamanni*, who had found work in the Roman military since the time of Constantine I, as well as the Franks, Burgundians and Goths had all adopted elements of Roman material culture and were heavily Christianized by the late Empire.²¹¹ Employing them in the defense of British cities would not have seemed strange or unwise in the years following the rebellion of 409.

In the absence of imperial currency imports or a working mint, the only way to have paid these mercenaries was in allotments of land. Evidence of communities of *Germani** rises significantly in southern and eastern Britain from this point on, many of which seem to have been strategically sited for the defense of urban centers. Based upon

burial sites containing significant quantities of Germanic items, such as belt-buckles, brooches and weaponry, the evidence shows communities of Germanic mercenaries, possibly along with their families, springing up around important administrative centers in southern Britain from the first quarter of the fifth century on. While it has been noted that the presence of apparently Germanic military gear does not always indicate the presence of Germanic troops, their chronology and their context within distinctly non-Roman burials strongly suggests the rather sudden presence of significant numbers of Germanic communities in southern Britain. Londinium, the former diocesan center and the capital of the province of Maxima Caesariensis as well as the seat of the provincial bishop, would have remained a relatively wealthy site through the end of the fourth century, and thus a prime target for coastal raiders. By the mid-fifth century the city acquired a defensive belt of Germanic settlements which formed a semi-circular array just south of the city. Their apparently strategic distribution along the major Roman roads suggests a substantial community or series of communities of Germanic troops placed for the defense of the city.²¹²

This priority defense for Londinium suggests that the city retained significant importance for several decades after the departure of the imperial administration, refuting the notion that urban life collapsed suddenly and completely in Britain in the early fifth century. That Londinium was still important as a political and/or ecclesiastical center until this point seems clear. If the diocesan government was not replaced following the rebellion of 409, Londinium may have been the center of a reconstituted *curia*, administering all or part of the former province. It seems certain then that some of the political institutions of Roman-Britain survived in the former civil zone for at least a few decades after the

expulsion of the magistrates, as somebody was clearly organizing the defense of the cities and parceling out land to the mercenaries.

Yet the few written sources that exist for this period suggest that Britain suffered a series of calamities in the middle of the fifth century which signaled the end of a Roman way of life in the former diocese. Written in the year 452 the *Chronica Gallica*, an account of the events of Gaul in the fifth century, points to the year 441 as the beginning of a series of devastating incursions by Saxon raiders, stating: "Britain, which up to this time had suffered manifold devastations and accidents, was subjected to the domination of the Saxons"²¹³ The British cleric Gildas, perhaps the most famous chronicler of Britain during the fifth and sixth centuries, alleges that amid infighting and relentless depredations by *Picti* the remaining British magistrates, "the wretched remnant" of the former Roman administration, wrote to the *magister militum* Flavius Aëtius, commander of the Western Roman armies, for aid against the invaders:

'To Aëtius,...The barbarians drive us to the sea; the sea throws us back on the barbarians: thus two modes of death await us, we are either slain or drowned.' The Romans, however, could not assist them, and in the meantime the discomfited people, wandering in the woods, began to feel the effects of a severe famine...²¹⁴

Though Gildas claims that the British rallied against their enemies and gained a respite for a time, he nonetheless asserts that this was the beginning of their ruin. Receiving no help from Rome the British, according to Gildas, sent for help across the sea to the *Saxones*, a fierce Germanic tribe along the North Sea coast. These warriors, the "wolfish offspring" of Germania, soon rebelled against their British employers and began to despoil the lands of eastern Britain. Finding Britain to their liking and easy to plunder, they sent home for reinforcements, and shortly thereafter boatload after boatload of Saxon warriors began to land on British shores.²¹⁵

This account cannot be entirely accurate, as the British had been employing Germanic mercenaries for some time, both during and after the Roman period, although the Saxons themselves may have been a tribe new to Britain. Gildas' account is valuable in that it concurs with the *Chronica Gallica* in placing this burst of Saxon violence in the middle of the fifth century. While the letter is not dated, Gildas asserts that when the British wrote to Aëtius he was consul "for the third time", which places the letter in the years between 446 and 454.²¹⁶ Writing in the middle of the sixth century, Gildas was at least a century removed from the events he is describing, and his purpose in writing was not to present an accurate history so much as to present a religious condemnation of what he saw as the wickedness and corruption amongst the ruling British elite of his day. His account therefore must be viewed with skepticism. The *Chronica Gallica*, while fairly contemporary with the events it is describing, is unlikely to paint an accurate picture of the military and political situation of southern Britain at this time, as the archaeological record does not support its account of a sudden and total takeover by Saxon war-bands in the middle of the fifth century.²¹⁷

However, the archaeology does suggest that something profoundly disturbed the old Roman political institutions in southern and eastern Britain at this time. While the chronology is uncertain, at some point in the fifth century Londinium seems to have been almost wholly abandoned, with a smaller rural community established a little over a mile westward along the Thames.²¹⁸ The sudden desertion of the city would imply that something dramatic did occur in southern Britain in the mid to late fifth century. That Londinium had been of vital importance up until the very end of the Roman period is beyond question, with evidence for building repairs as well as the importation of Mediterranean trade goods attested in the archaeological record.²¹⁹ Furthermore, the

continued defense of Londinium by Germanic mercenaries until at least the middle of the century suggests that whatever happened was quite sudden, for the city was empty by no later than 500. Londinium was not the only city to have suffered a dramatic decline during this period, as urban centers across southern and eastern Britain show only scanty evidence for continued occupation beyond the middle of the fifth century.²²⁰

All of this implies serious disruption in the governmental structures of southern Britain over the course of the second half of the fifth century. From this point on it is impossible to know with any certainty the nature of government in the former heartlands of Roman Britain. With the urban centers showing little sign of civic authority, it seems unlikely that the *curiae* continued to function after the mid-fifth century. As the written record for this period is questionable at best, it is the archaeological record which will be able to ascertain whether Britain suffered from a massive invasion by Saxon warriors, or whether other factors had a hand in the disappearance of Roman political institutions. As the majority of the population and economic activity of late Roman Britain was located in the countryside, it is to rural archaeology that we will turn first to determine whether or not there was a significant disruption to the Roman way of life.

Economy and Polity

If we are to believe that large numbers of Saxon warriors invaded the east and south of Britain in the middle of the fifth century, we should expect to find significant evidence of this violence and upheaval in the archaeological record. The wide-spread devastation wrought by invading Saxon hordes would surely have had a tremendous negative effect upon both agriculture and patterns of settlement, and therefore should be easy to spot. If large numbers of British peasants were being slaughtered and driven off

their land, to be replaced by foreign Germanic colonists, known Romano-British rural sites should show clear signs of destruction, and the countryside itself should have evidence of serious disruption in land usage. Rural archaeology, however, suggests that none of this took place.

Excavation at the site of a Romano-British farm near the town of Water Newton, Cambridgeshire, has produced evidence showing continuous occupation from the Roman period into the early sixth century. Known as Orton Hall Farm, the site is one of the most productive post-Roman sites in eastern England, yielding significant finds over a broad spectrum of time. In the middle of the fourth century this farm, located just a few miles southeast of the Roman town of Durobrivae, was at the height of its prosperity and activity, in keeping with the general flowering of the economy of rural Britain during its "Golden Age". In the first decade of the fifth century, the farm was somewhat less active than it had once been, but was still one of the largest farms in the area, precisely the sort of site that might be targeted by marauding Saxons seeking land. Therefore an examination of this farm, which lies in the heart of the countryside typically thought to have been overrun by the Saxons, should provide a microcosmic view of the situation in eastern Britain after the end of Roman rule.

Over the course of the fifth century, the material culture of the farm shows signs of impoverishment, as the high quality, mass produced pottery of the Roman era came to be replaced by far simpler, handmade wares. Items of personal adornment too changed over time, with Roman jewelry and ornamentation slowly being replaced by distinctive Germanic "Saxon" style brooches and clothing. The main farmhouse, fashioned from mortared stone in the Roman period, was torn down at some point after the mid-fifth century and replaced with a timber building of similar size and shape.²²¹ At this

approximate time a few distinctly Germanic structures show up on the site. Known as Grubenhäuser, or Sunken Feature Buildings (SFBs), these were small, square or rectangular buildings with a shallow pit carved out from beneath its foundations. These structures are generally considered to have been craft and/or storage buildings, rather than houses, and are constructed in a classically continental Germanic style.²²² The fields surrounding the farm show signs of a decrease in activity after the early fifth century. Drainage ditches silted up, and there was an apparent decline in the cultivation of grains, with a concurrent increase in the raising of livestock. However, there is no evidence of abandonment or disuse, and despite the diminution of grain production, there is no evidence of a dramatic change in agricultural activity.²²³

Most importantly there is no sign of a gap in the occupation of the site. Despite some significant changes in the material culture of the occupants, the site itself bears no evidence of violence or disruption. What it does show is a continuity of habitation alongside the substantial economic and agricultural changes affecting Britain at this time. Across southern and eastern Britain in the fifth century, agriculture demonstrates signs of declining activity similar to that at Orton Hall Farm. Drainage systems ceased to be maintained, and farmland in certain areas may have reverted to marshland. Excavations at rural sites show an increase in the number of deer bones discarded in garbage pits from the early fifth century on, suggesting either a resurgence of wildlife or a need to seek out new sources of food in the face of declining agricultural production.²²⁴ Labor-intensive ditches, used to mark out agricultural boundaries, fell out of use and began to fill in, while certain crops disappeared from the agricultural record, including cucumbers, turnips, apples and plums. Overall, the picture of agriculture in southeast Britain in the fifth century is one of simplification and de-intensification.²²⁵

Despite this, there is no sign of widespread land abandonment. The study of ancient pollen deposits provides crucial evidence against this model of land abandonment and agricultural collapse. Across southern and eastern Britain, there is no evidence of significant reforestation over the fifth century. This is a process that would have happened relatively quickly had it occurred at all. Farmland will revert to dense scrub within a decade of being abandoned, with the growth of secondary forest taking an additional forty or fifty years. Therefore, if there was a sudden, catastrophic disturbance in population and land usage, as is posited under the Saxon invasion hypothesis, it would show up in pollen deposits. The pollen record, however, shows little evidence of scrub regeneration, and none at all of reforestation. Furthermore, there is no sign of widespread violence affecting the countryside, no “massive war graves”, no destroyed villages or abandoned farms, or any other evidence of an invasion.²²⁶ The scenario we are left with is one of a decline in large scale agriculture and a change from intensive grain production to mixed subsistence farming and stock raising over the fifth century.²²⁷ The countryside in the south and east was certainly less tightly-managed and controlled than it had been during the Roman period, but was by no means reverting to a wilderness.

Nonetheless, there were significant transformations underway in southern and eastern Britain, as the declining prosperity and changing material culture at Orton Hall Farm demonstrates. If agrarian activity was largely stable, industrial activity and the market economy were undergoing radical changes. After the cessation of coin imports in the first decade of the fifth century, there seems to have been no effort to reopen the mint at Londinium. Perhaps the machinery had been removed by the imperial government following the reign of Magnus Maximus, or perhaps the wealthy classes of Britain were hesitant to turn their gold and silver into coins following the expulsion of Constantine’s

administration in 409. In any case, the lack of new coins was to have dire consequences for the economy of Britain in the fifth century.

In the south and east, coins continued to be circulated until the second quarter of the fifth century, although these began to be clipped at the edges, diminishing their value and implying a lack of any kind of governmental control over the economy. While a few hoards of clipped late-Roman coins have been found in eastern Britain dating to the late fifth century, it is uncertain in what context they would have been used.²²⁸ While the coins themselves may have held a certain value, due to their degraded state and the scarcity of coin finds in general from this period it is extremely unlikely that a coin-based economy continued to function in any meaningful form by the sixth century.

This was a critical difference between the break with Rome in 409 and the earlier rebellions of the fourth century. With no effort made to revitalize the coin economy, many features of Roman life would have withered away. Without coins, there could be no Roman tax system, no professional military force, and no market economy. Therefore taxes and rent were probably paid in kind, while mercenaries were paid in allotments of land. Local markets, operating on a barter system, undoubtedly survived, but the lack of coinage meant that the industries which had been so vital to the economy of Roman Britain could not have survived. Without either imperial government contracts or a customer base capable of paying in cash, the mass-production of manufactured goods which typified the rural economy of Britain in the late fourth century would have vanished. Combined with the breakdown of the diocesan government and the subsequent collapse of the long-distance trade networks both within Britain and the Continent, these factors would have been a death-knell for the economy of Britain.²²⁹

The most striking example of this economic meltdown in southern and eastern Britain was the total disappearance of the pottery industry. Southern Britain in particular had been a hub of pottery production, possessing both the Alice Holt and New Forest pottery centers, which were producing vast quantities of high-quality vessels into the first decade of the fifth century. By the middle of the fifth century there is no sign that any of the large scale pottery producers were still in business. Without either a civilian or military market able to pay in cash, and with the collapse of the trading networks which made the distribution their wares possible, these large-scale producers could not survive. Most of the smaller pottery producers of southern Britain also failed in the first half of the fifth century, though a few extremely localized operations still existed. Without the flow of cash coming in and out of Britain through long-distance trade and the imperial taxation system, the rural industries simply could not survive.²³⁰

As a result, pottery finds of the fifth century are extremely few in number. Those British-produced pieces that can be dated to this period are of a type known as “grass-fired” or “grass-tempered” pottery. Termed “grass-fired” due to the distinctive marks left on their bases after being placed on grassy surfaces prior to firing, this was the standard ware supplied by the local, village-scale producers of Britain in the fifth century.²³¹ Small, simple and rather crude in fashion, grass-fired pottery is found throughout Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries, but in radically reduced numbers when compared to pottery deposits from earlier eras, which signifies a dramatic decline in both the quality and quantity of pottery production in the post-Roman period.²³²

In the context of this economic disintegration it is not surprising that the cities of the southeast declined so rapidly in the second half of the fifth century. This decline was not a wholesale collapse in urban life, however. Although Londinium was abandoned

completely, evidence exists which suggests that a degree of habitation may have continued at other cities in the former civil zone of Britain. The *colonia* of Camulodunum (Colchester) shows some signs of continued use, with two burials dated to the later fifth century found within its walls, as well as several SFBs with associated Germanic pottery. At the *civitas* of Noviomagus Reginorum (Chichester), a Christian cemetery within the town walls continued to be used until the sixth century, after which point evidence of Germanic practices subsumes the earlier burials. Verulamium in modern Hertfordshire was the center of the cult of a British Christian martyr (St. Alban) during the later Roman period, and continued as a votive center well beyond the collapse of Roman rule in Britain, with finds of metalwork and pottery implying substantial continued activity beyond the fifth century. Finally, at Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester), late fifth century earthworks were dug around a large area immediately south of the town, suggesting that something there was worth defending.²³³

Even if there continued to be activity on these sites into the late fifth century and beyond, however, it was in a radically reduced capacity when compared to the Roman period. Moreover, the evidence from Camulodunum and Noviomagus Reginorum suggests that in the later phases of occupation their inhabitants were losing their Romano-British cultural identity. Many of the other cities and towns of the civil zone show no compelling evidence of activity or occupation of any kind beyond the mid-fifth century. This should not be surprising, as the urban centers of Roman Britain depended upon a monetary economy for their very existence. Though they were already in decline by the end of the fourth century, vital economic activity still persisted at urban centers across Britain, and the imperial authorities still thought them worth defending. Without the trade networks and rural industries to sustain it, however, urban life in Britain began to collapse in the middle

of the fifth century, due not to cataclysmic invasion by barbarian foreigners, but by the final collapse of the provincial economy. As the cities of southern Britain were abandoned, or declined into small-scale rural communities, the *curiae* which governed them cannot have survived in a recognizably Roman form, and the old *civitates* of the Roman Empire would have ceased to have any relevance. Those urban sites which continued to be occupied beyond the fifth century were utilized in a distinctly non-urban fashion.

As with rural sites, there is little evidence of violent destruction at the urban centers of the south and east in the archaeological record. In comparison, the rebellion of Boudicca in the first century CE has left clear and distinct archaeological traces, with layers of ash and human bones lying thick at the cities sacked by her warriors. Nothing like this exists for the fifth century, with the possible exception of the town of Venta Icenum (Castor-by-Norwich) in East Anglia, ironically the *civitas* of Boudicca's tribe, the *Iceni*.²³⁴ The cities of Roman Britain were not destroyed in an orgy of fire and slaughter, but simply crumbled away following the collapse of the economy in the fifth century.

Another feature of Roman life which did not survive the fifth century in southeastern Britain was the villa. As late as the final decade of the fourth century villas continued to be built and improved upon in southern Britain, suggesting that at least some of the Romano-British elites felt confident enough in the future to build opulent residences in the undefended countryside.²³⁵ For a time after the end of the Roman administration of Britain, life in these villas was able to continue much as it had before. In the surviving works of St. Patrick the fifth century cleric mentions that he grew up on a villa near the town of *Bannaventa taberniae*, an as-yet undiscovered Roman town somewhere near the Severn estuary in the West Country. The quality of Patrick's Latin, the administrative career he ascribes to his father and his description of his lifestyle as a boy are clear signs

that he grew up in a typically late-Roman culture. It is uncertain when exactly Patrick was alive, but it is believed that he was evangelizing in Ireland sometime after 450, and thus was likely in his youth in the second quarter of the fifth century. Therefore, a recognizably Roman way of life on a villa estate was still possible in southern Britain well into the fifth century.²³⁶

Nonetheless, the villa lifestyle had vanished in the old civil zone of Roman Britain by the year 500. As with both the cities and villages of Britain, there is little evidence of villas being destroyed by violence, but evidence of occupation and activity at villas becomes sparse from the early fifth century on. Dating what finds exist with certainty is difficult due to the lack of new coins circulating in the countryside, yet certain observations can nevertheless be made about the final stages of villa life in Britain. In the decades on either side of the year 400, many villas show signs of transitioning from luxurious residences to those of a more humble character. At a number of villa sites certain rooms and chambers were renovated for industrial or agricultural activities such as metal shops and grain-drying ovens, likely as villa proprietors sought to become more self-sufficient in increasingly uncertain times.²³⁷ As the fifth century continued, villa sites show a marked decline in occupation and prosperity, with grass-fired pottery replacing earlier Romano-British wares and the villa structures themselves becoming increasingly derelict. At many villa sites there is evidence of occupants demolishing entire wings of the main house as they became unstable, rather than repairing them, which indicates a decline in the availability and quality of craftsmen in the post-Roman period. At a villa outside the *colonia* of Glevum (Gloucester), part of the main building was damaged by fire, but was never repaired, with the occupants simply walling off that section of the house.²³⁸ In other villas what is typically referred to as “squatter occupation” is found in the final phases of

habitation. This includes activities such as establishing cooking fires on top of floor mosaics, converting derelict chambers to agricultural building (barns, etc.) and plundering remaining masonry for other uses.²³⁹ While some of this activity may represent final stage occupation by the villa's original owners (or their descendants) rather than the arrival of new occupants at an abandoned structure²⁴⁰, it nonetheless represents a dramatic decline in the standard of living at these once palatial estates. By the sixth century even this greatly diminished lifestyle vanished from the archaeological record as the grand villas of Britain were allowed to crumble back into the fields.

The reversion of agriculture from large-scale grain plantations to subsistence level farming, the collapse of rural industry, the diminution and abandonment of cities and towns and the disappearance of the villa can all be easily explained by the withdrawal of the imperial state and its army and the subsequent collapse in the money economy and trade networks that it created. The loss of each of these facets of life in southern and eastern Britain would have exacerbated and fed off the decline of the others. The absence of both an imperial diocesan bureaucracy and the imperial army meant that no new coin was flowing into Britain. With no need to supply the military either on the Continent or at home, and without a profit-driven market with which to sell surpluses, the vast grain-fields of Britain would have become unnecessary, which would have hit directly at the villa economy that both required the profits produced by these massive fields and made their cultivation possible. The decline in the villa economy would have deprived the urban centers of their primary customers for their luxury and manufactured goods, which in turn would have disrupted the flow of the remaining coin stocks in Britain. The scarcity of money as well as the disruption of the transport and distribution systems caused by the collapse of the diocesan government would have made the great rural industries impossible

to maintain. The economy of Britain was too dependent upon the Roman state to survive on its own, and the political and economic gamble of the British in 409 ended in a dismal failure for much of the former civil zone.

Apart from this economic collapse, the growing presence of Germanic cultural items at sites across southern and eastern Britain represents the most significant development of the fifth century. Despite the apparent inaccuracy of both Gildas and the *Chronica Gallica* in describing a military takeover of southern Britain by Saxon barbarians, there is evidence for an increasing Germanic cultural presence from the mid-fifth century on, particularly along the eastern shores of Britain. By the sixth century there was an undeniable cultural sea change occurring across the southeast, one that would have enormous implications for the development of society in Britain in the Early Middle Ages. It has been demonstrated that no significant invasion by North Sea barbarians occurred in Britain in the fifth century, yet by the year 500 the shift from a Romano-British culture to a Germanic one was well under way in parts of Britain.

Culture and Worship

The seeds of fifth century Germanic culture in Britain can be found in the upheavals of the later fourth century. Although Germanic soldiers had a long history in Britain, both as federate troops and settled *laeti*, the fourth century saw a new Germanic tribe in Britain. Called *saxones* by Late Antique writers, their tribal name has entered the English language as “Saxons”. Hailing from the North Sea coast of modern Germany and Holland, these *Germani* were culturally distinct from the mercenary troops utilized by under the Late Empire, and raided along the eastern and southern coasts of Britain from the fourth century on. Whereas the tribes from which Rome typically recruited its mercenary

troops were often already highly Romanized in their culture and political structures, the Saxons had little contact with Roman civilization prior to their initial raids upon the British coasts in the fourth century. Their description by Roman and early medieval observers generally emphasizes their barbarous nature and their ferocity in battle. The Gallo-Roman aristocrat Sidonius Apollinaris, writing in the middle of the fifth century, describes the Saxons as vicious pagan raiders, moving up and down the north coast of Gaul in hide-covered boats. An interesting detail which suggests that Sidonius had access to eyewitness accounts of the Saxons is their traditional hairstyle, which he describes as being shaved in the front and grown long in the back in order to make their faces seem larger, presumably to frighten their enemies.²⁴¹ The Gallic bishop Gregory of Tours too describes Saxon raiders in Gaul, chronicling their activities from the late Roman period until his day in the late sixth century. Implacable foes, Gregory's account depicts them battling against the Roman army, the Merovingian kings and the Ostrogothic rulers of post-Roman Italy.²⁴² Ever on the move and always ready for battle, they appear as formidable opponents in the ancient texts. Just how accurate a picture this is of the peoples who lived along the North German Plain in Late Antiquity is impossible to know. Nonetheless, these are the people alleged to have invaded Britain in the fifth century and put its people to the sword, along with other tribes generally referred to as "Angles" and "Jutes"²⁴³. While archaeology tells us that this invasion cannot have taken place as described, the fifth century nonetheless saw the arrival of a new tribal element in Britain. The question that remains is whether or not these new peoples were the same fearsome raiders described in the ancient texts.

In the late Roman period in Britain the standard dwelling of the Romano-British peasantry was the roundhouse, a circular, wattle-and-daub structure with a thatched roof that had remained essentially unchanged since the Iron Age, making British villages and

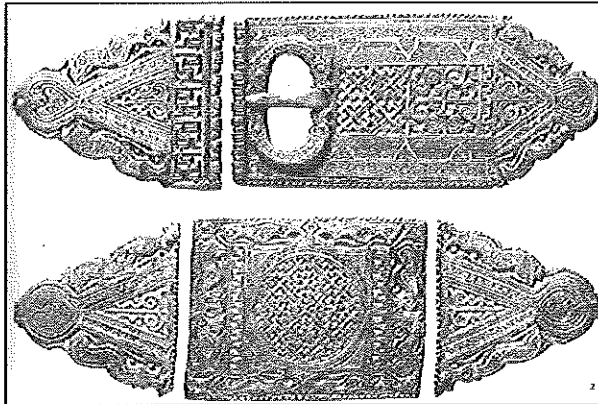
farms readily identifiable in the post-Roman period.²⁴⁴ From the middle fifth century however a number of distinctly Germanic settlements began to appear in Britain, particularly along the coasts and waterways of the east. These are generally distinguished from the communities of both the Romano-British and those of the Germanic *laeti* by their distinctive buildings, their pottery and their burial habits. On sites identified as “Saxon” in Britain two types of building dominate: the sunken-feature buildings already mentioned (SFBs), and the rectangular surface fast structures often called “longhouses”, which are often taken to be the primary residential structures of the Germanic peoples.²⁴⁵ Both building types are amply represented in continental Germanic village sites, and therefore would seem to clearly indicate the presence of *Germani* in Britain.

As we have seen, however, SFBs were also constructed at sites strategically placed in defensive positions around Roman cities in the early fifth century, suggesting that these were settlements of the Germanic mercenaries utilized by the post-Roman authorities of southern Britain. This suggests that SFBs were commonplace amongst Germanic cultures, and cannot be used to signify the presence of new peoples. The longhouses pose a similar problem. Built out of timber, they can be very hard to detect in the archaeological record, and when they are, they are not readily distinguishable from the aisled barns and farmhouses common in Roman Britain.²⁴⁶ While clusters of longhouses and SFB’s together, without any apparent strategic planning, would suggest a community of *Germani* not affiliated with post-Roman British officials, further evidence is needed to detect new migrants with greater certainty.

Two specific sites in Britain are often taken as evidence of new communities in the post-Roman period, given that they are comprised of both SFB’s and longhouses and appear unconnected with any Romano-British settlement. Located near the villages of

Mucking, Essex and West Stow, Suffolk, the sites are dateable to the late fifth century through sixth centuries. They are remarkably well-preserved sites, and are significant in that they show evidence of a “shifting settlement pattern”: although both sites possess large numbers of excavated buildings, only a few of them were occupied at any given point in time, suggesting that new buildings were constructed in differing patterns at the same sites over the years. This is often interpreted as generational construction, with each generation building new houses and outbuildings in slightly differing locations across the site, a trait characteristic of continental Germanic villages of the period. Both sites were fairly small settlements at any given time in their history, with each settlement phase representing the activity of a small grouping of individual families or clans. The community at West stow likely numbered no more than fifty individuals at any time²⁴⁷, while the one at Mucking averaged around eighty to ninety

individuals in a given phase.²⁴⁸



5th century
Germanic belt-
buckle found at
Mucking, Essex.
Campbell, et. al
1991: pg. 23

Significantly, the settlements at West Stow and Mucking show no sign of a warrior elite. A number of men at the two sites were buried with swords, but they are in the minority. Furthermore there is little evidence of social hierarchy, though some families appear to have been somewhat more prosperous than others, and land seems to have been worked separately by individual families, rather than communally farmed. Both settlements therefore must have been small-scale agricultural communities, organized

around extended family units possessing a simple material culture, with little social stratification and no evidence of a warrior class. Despite being culturally and materially distinct from both British settlements and those of Germanic *laeti*, there is no evidence that these newcomers comprised a nation of warriors on the move. The sites of Mucking and West Stow are unique only in their degree of preservation, as most readily identifiable “Saxon” sites from this period are also small, simple farming settlements. The arrival of new peoples in eastern Britain bore the characteristics of immigration, rather than invasion.²⁴⁹ That Germanic peoples came to Britain in some numbers is evidenced by modern genetic analysis, which suggests the presence of a strong Germanic influence along the eastern seaboard of modern England. The analysis of Y-chromosomal DNA indicates a significant and, evolutionarily speaking, recent influx of Germanic migrants to Britain, with 10%-20% of men in England being the patrilineal descendants of North Sea *Germani*.²⁵⁰

While the material culture of these earlier migrants was poor, it was nonetheless highly influential upon the surrounding British peasant communities. As the appearance of Saxon pottery and metalwork on the farms, villas and fading urban centers of Britain shows, the goods and materials brought by the new *Germani* held their own attraction for the British communities. A number of new pottery types begin to appear in the archaeological record from the mid-fifth century on, including “comb-point”, “bionical”, “coarse-slipped” and “combing and pinched” rustication, all of which have close stylistic relatives on the Continent and no Romano-British analogue. The widespread distribution of Germanic wares in eastern Britain shows that trade networks were already being reestablished by the late fifth century, and the presence of these new pottery types on

identifiable British sites shows that the migrants and the natives were soon trading with each other.²⁵¹

Jewelry and metalwork are also excellent indicators of a new Germanic population in southern and eastern Britain in the fifth century. In particular two types of brooches, the circular “saucer” brooch and the “equal-armed” brooch, which begin to show up in for the first time in the archaeological record in Britain in the fifth century, are nearly identical in form to brooches commonly found in northern Germany in the same period.²⁵² In addition cruciform brooches, wrist-clasps for women’s dresses, annular brooches and square-headed brooches too are found frequently at British sites from the late fifth through sixth centuries, all of which have close analogues with items produced in northern Germany as well as southern Scandinavia, implying the arrival of a number of different tribal ethnicities in Britain.²⁵³

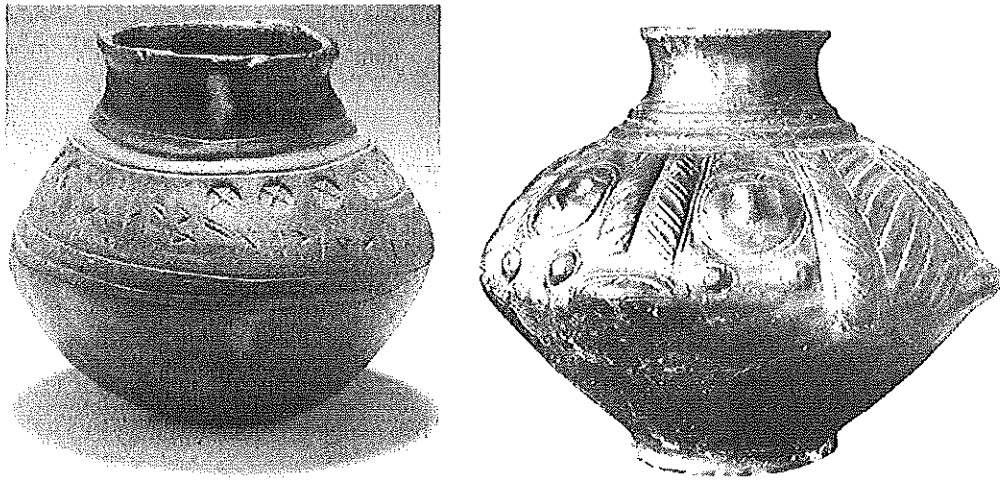
The appearance of these new types of pottery and metalwork do not necessarily indicate the presence of new *Germani* at every site in which they are found. Small-scale trade in pottery had already begun by the late fifth century, and the presence of Saxon-style pottery on a site may only signify the existence of a local market, rather than a Germanic community. Likewise foreign styles of jewelry do not always come attached to foreigners, and themselves could be objects traded across the North Sea. Therefore the excavation and study of burial sites is necessary for the identification of new cultural groups, as different burial practices imply different religious beliefs and rituals, and the presence of items as grave deposits is a better indicator of a community than pottery shards scattered in a domestic context.

There are four general types of burial in southern and eastern Britain in the fifth century: cremation burials (ashes interred in ceramic urns), inhumations with grave goods,

inhumation typical of pagan Romano-British practice, and inhumation typical of Christian Romano-British practice. The first two burial styles are typically Germanic, while the last two were common across Britain in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.²⁵⁴ Of all these practices cremation is most likely to signify the presence of newly arrived pagan *Germani*. While cremation had once been a common rite in the Roman culture, it had come to be replaced in the late Empire with inhumation, a practice that was further developed under Christianity and its belief in the Resurrection. Among the Germanic tribes most closely associated with Rome inhumation too had become common by the end of the fourth century, as Germanic *laeti* and federate troops sought to emulate the cultural practices of their Roman employers. By the fifth century many Germanic tribes had partially or wholly adopted Christianity, further conflating their burial practices with those of the Romans. Thus the sudden reappearance of cremation rites in Britain in the fifth century strongly suggests the presence of non-Romanized pagan Germanic communities.²⁵⁵

Cremation practices in Britain are similar to those on the Continent in “Inner Germania”, the Germanic cultural area which lay outside of direct Roman influence. In this practice the body of the deceased was placed upon the ground with various items of personal adornment and ornamentation. A pyre was then constructed over the body, and the resulting ashes and melted metal swept up and deposited in an urn, which was then buried in an open field.²⁵⁶ Certain urns contained the ashes of horses, or sometimes bits and bridles, implying the cremation of someone of relatively high status. Some of the known urn fields in Britain are quite large, suggesting that they were utilized by multiple communities with common religious practices. The distribution of cemeteries exhibiting only cremation burials gives us vital clues as to the spread of pagan Germanic communities in fifth century Britain. The greatest concentration of cremation cemeteries

lies along the eastern coasts of Britain, with some penetration inland along the major rivers, supporting the hypothesis of immigrants arriving by sea.²⁵⁷



Left: Anglo-Saxon cremation urn from Lincolnshire. Note the Germanic runes inscribed along the sides. 5th-6th century. Dark 2010: pg. 74

Right: Germanic cremation urn from Lower Saxony, Germany. The abstract human faces are a striking example of Migration Era Germanic art: Campbell, et. al. 1991: pg. 30

Most fifth century cemeteries in eastern and southern Britain exhibit both cremation and inhumation burials however, making the mapping of distinct cultural communities more difficult. In most cemeteries containing cremation and inhumation burials, the inhumations are generally of the Germanic style, implying mixed religious beliefs and practices within communities. Such inhumation burials which provide us with most of our evidence of Germanic material culture in fifth century Britain. 47% of male burials contained weapons of some kind, mostly spears, with shields and swords found more rarely.²⁵⁸ Women were often buried with pendants, jewelry, and domestic items, with regional variation in jewelry and pendant type perhaps representing differing ethnicities. The deposition of luxury goods, rich weaponry and horse skeletons in later burials may represent an emerging warrior elite. Infants are almost never found in these

cemeteries in a striking contrast with Romano-British burial practices, suggesting once again a culture largely free of Roman influence.²⁵⁹

Many mixed cremation and inhumation cemeteries possess a remarkable degree of differentiation in practice, suggesting that different families or clans had burial rites specific to themselves. They also exhibit shifting trends in burial practices, with many mixed cremation/inhumation cemeteries possessing mostly or solely cremation burials in their earliest phases, with the practice of inhumation growing over time.²⁶⁰ This may be a purely insular development, or it may be due to growing acculturation to British burial practices. That British and Germanic communities were in close proximity with each other is evidenced by the presence in mixed cremation/inhumation cemeteries of burials that appear distinctly British, as indicated by a lack of grave-goods and certain British peculiarities, such as the severing of the head of the deceased and placing it between the legs.²⁶¹ Other typically British practices include placing a coin in the hand or on the eyes of the corpse, presumably to “pay the boatman”. These are distinctly pagan practices, and indicate the survival of a significant pagan element in the culture of rural British in the fifth century. Less common are burials that contain Christian elements. In most late Roman contexts Christian burials lacked the grave-goods common in pagan funerary practice, yet a number of fifth century graves in otherwise pagan cemeteries contain “prominently displayed” coins inscribed with the *chi-ro* symbol and other distinctly Christian items.²⁶² In these cases, perhaps the families of the deceased wished to assert their Christian identity in areas dominated by pagans. The fact that *Germani* and British appear to have been sharing cemeteries with each other implies that the two communities lived side-by-side, and largely in peace. In this context the trend towards inhumation with grave-goods may equally reflect either the adoption of British practices by Germanic migrants or the

adoption of Germanic practices by the indigenous British. In either case, both burial practices and the increasingly Germanic profile of material culture in southern and eastern Britain from the fifth century on suggests a profound shift in the way the people of Britain were shaping their identities.²⁶³

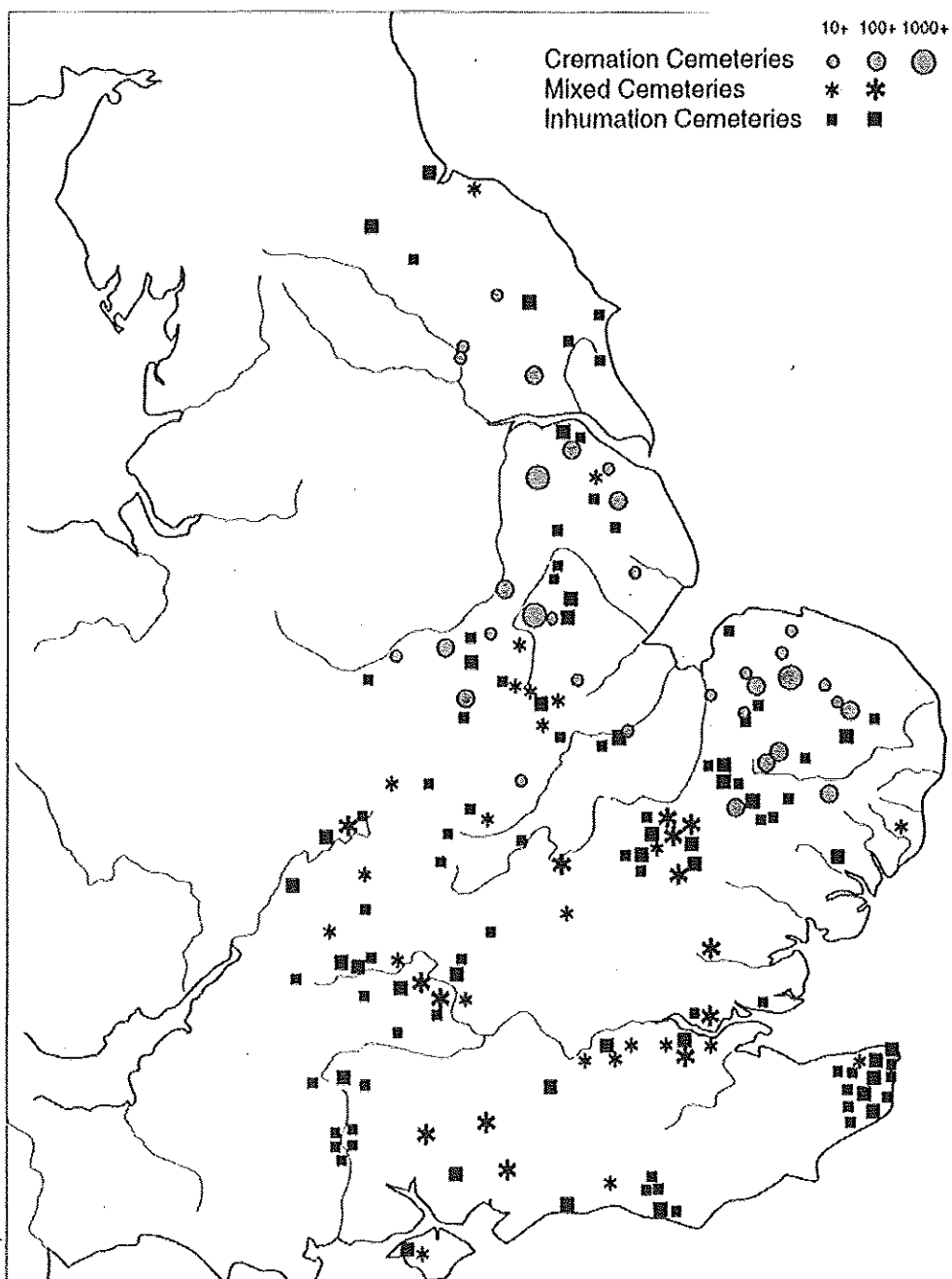
Despite the prevalence of pagan burial practices both Germanic and British, the distribution of characteristically Christian cemeteries across southern and eastern Britain evidences a strong continuity of Romano-Christian culture in certain areas. There are broad swaths of land across the south and east that are almost entirely free of Germanic- style burials, cremation and inhumation, as well as pagan British practices. Rural Christian cemeteries bear several features that readily distinguish them from pagan burial grounds. Christian burials typically lack grave-goods, though as we have seen this alone is not a signifier of a Christian grave. Additional evidence of Christian graves include the use of coffins, headstones inscribed with Christian symbols, burial in rows and the alignment of the corpse east-to-west in anticipation of Judgment Day.²⁶⁴ While the use of coffins declined in the post-Roman period, likely due to a lack of craftsmen and the dereliction of saw-mills²⁶⁵, these uniquely Christian aspects can be identified at numerous burial sites. These Christian cemeteries are far more homogenous in their appearance than pagan cemeteries, and their size and distribution suggests a number of significant Christian communities in the post-Roman southeast.²⁶⁶

As the cities of the east decayed, their secular clergy too seems to have crumbled away. There is no evidence that anything remained of the Church hierarchy by the sixth century, although Christianity survived in the east until the evangelization of the Saxons under Augustine. The town of Verluamium with its shrine to St. Alban is one of the few urban centers of worship which survived through the fifth century. Its continuity through

the Saxon period may owe more to the long history of the site as a religious center rather than to any inherent urban vitality. In a fascinating example of cultural syncretism, the site of Verulamium was originally an Iron Age Celtic shrine venerating the “cult of the severed head”, where numerous skulls and images of human heads were left as votive deposits. In the fourth century the site became a shrine to a Christian martyr who, intriguingly, was executed by beheading.²⁶⁷

The presence of large-scale Christian cemeteries in the heartlands of Saxon Britain refutes the commonly held notion that Christianity was wiped out in eastern Britain in the wake of Saxon invasions by demonstrating that insular communities of Christians survived through the end of the fifth century and beyond. Nonetheless, there cannot have been an organized Roman church in Britain after the middle of the century, as the decline of the cities of Britain would have spelled the end of the urban-based hierarchy typical of the late Roman church. While sites such as Verulamium likely remained as centers of worship, there is no evidence of bishoprics surviving the collapse of the Roman administration in southern and eastern Britain, and for many Britons Christianity may have evolved into a

sort of folk religion.²⁶⁸



Map showing the distribution of cremation, inhumation and mixed cemeteries in Britain in the 5th-6th centuries.

Dark 2010: pg. 76

Despite the lack of pagan burial practices across significant areas of “Saxon Britain”, it is apparent that Christianity did suffer a serious reversal across large areas of the countryside. The region known today as East Anglia was one of the most heavily Christianized areas of late Roman Britain, yet virtually no evidence exists for the survival of organized Christianity after the fifth century.²⁶⁹ By contrast, the area possesses one of

the highest concentrations of cremation-only cemeteries in eastern Britain. It should be noted that aside from these cemeteries there is very little direct evidence for paganism in this area as well, but this has more to do with the nature of pagan worship than a lack of pagan practice.

The religious beliefs of the incoming Germanic migrants would have been similar to those commonly held across central Europe during the Migration Era. In his *Germania*, Tacitus describes the religious practices of the Germanic tribes as revolving primarily around ritual and divination, particularly the casting of lots, and lacking an organized priesthood. He also notes that Germanic paganism held the essence of the divine to live inside their women, and that certain tribes would go to tremendous lengths to prevent their womenfolk from being taken captive during war.²⁷⁰ While Tacitus never set foot in the *Germania* he describes, his account contains a degree of truth. While the Germanic tribes worshipped certain anthropomorphized deities such as Woden, Tyr and Thor, fifth century Germanic paganism seems to have revolved primarily around “impersonal divine powers” and nature spirits, who would intervene in the world of mortals to grant or withhold good fortune based upon the proper performance of certain rituals. This good fortune and divine power could be conferred onto an individual person, or onto an object, such as a weapon. Other aspects of Germanic belief included the importance of sacrifice, both of humans and animals, and ceremonial processions as a form of communal ritual activity. Furthermore, the various Germanic tribes seem never to have constructed permanent temples or centers of worship, preferring instead to commune with the divine in woodland groves or under the open sky.²⁷¹

In light of this it is unreasonable to expect to find much evidence of pagan worship in the archaeological record in fifth century Britain. While Germanic paganism would

begin to construct grand ritual centers and leave amazingly rich elite burials in Britain from the mid-sixth century on, fifth century pagan practice seems to have remained decidedly small-scale and informal. While some evidence of sacrificial activity exists in the form of carefully deposited bones and weapons, concrete proof of pagan practice remains elusive.²⁷²

Despite the elusiveness of pagan ritual outside of burial practices, the absence of evidence for a Christian church across large parts of eastern and southern Britain in the fifth century is the most striking cultural change in the post-Roman period. Theories abound as to why Christianity should decline so abruptly in an area where it had once been dominant. One hypothesis is that the Church hierarchy organized mass emigrations of Christian Romano-British to the Continent amidst the deteriorating conditions of the post-Roman period. This would explain both the sudden abandonment of urban centers across the south and east, as well as the arrival of Romano-British refugees in Gaul and Hispania in the late fifth century. To this day the peninsula of northwest France, called Armorica in the Roman period, is known as Brittany, while an area on the north coast of Spain is known as Britoña.²⁷³ While the countryside of southeastern Britain shows no signs of significant population disruption, if the emigration had been organized by the city-based Church hierarchy for the benefit of their wealthy urban congregations, the rural population may not have been greatly affected. Left behind by their Church, and living free of the rapacious landlords and villa elite of the late Roman world, the British peasants of the south and east may have been keen to accommodate newly arriving Germanic immigrants.

Conclusions

The archaeological record thus in no way corroborates the assertions by Gildas and others that southern and eastern Britain suffered a horrifically violent assault by Germanic invaders in the fifth century. While this area of Britain underwent many dramatic changes after the expulsion of the Roman administration, its dramatic transformations can be explained by factors other than foreign conquest. The collapse of Roman governmental structures and the decline of urban life are much more readily explained by economic catastrophe rather than invasion, and the gradual adoption of Germanic language and custom is better understood in terms of acculturation rather than extermination.

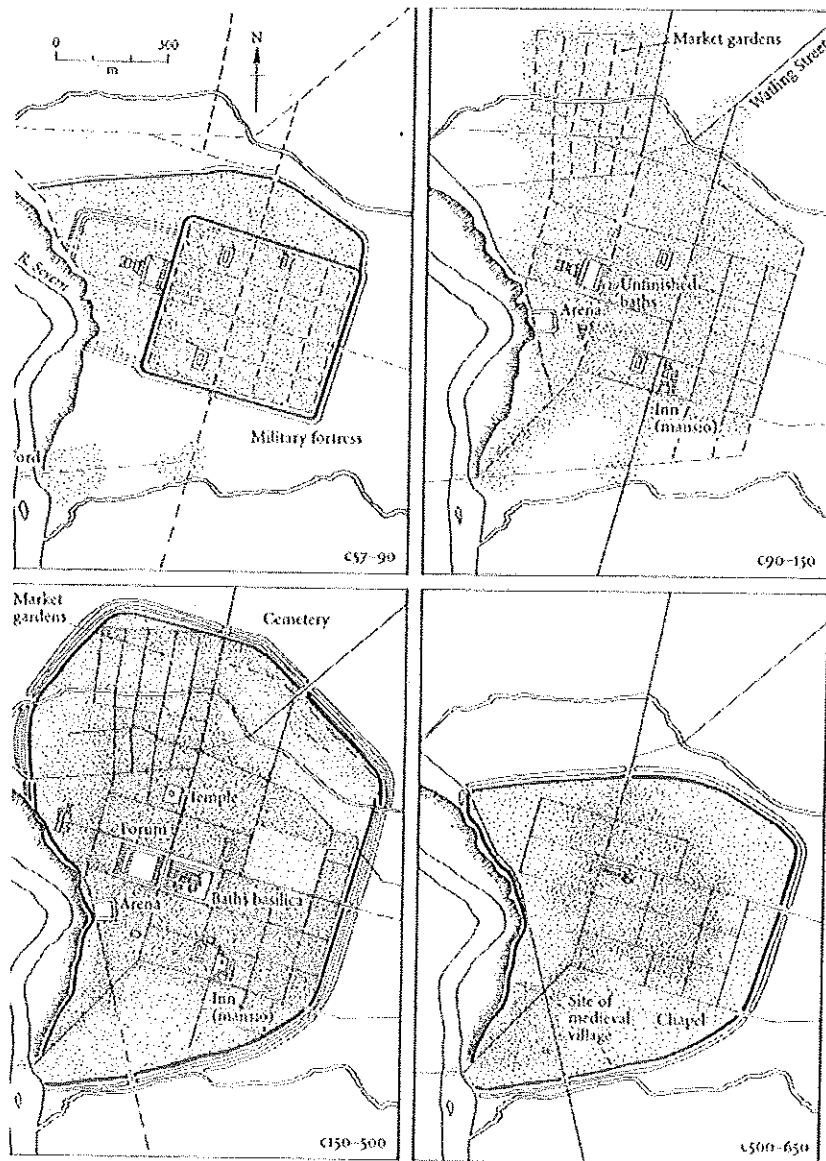
However, the significance of the differences between the Roman and post-Roman periods in the former civil zone of Britain cannot be overstated. While there was never an invasion by rapacious Germanic tribes, nonetheless a recognizably Roman way of life had vanished by the early sixth century. No evidence exists for either Roman forms of government or for a Roman Christian church. The Roman provincial economy had collapsed utterly, and urban life had declined to a negligible level. The only aspect of life in the south and east that enjoyed any kind of continuity was rural agrarianism, and even this experienced significant change from the Roman period. While it would be a gross oversimplification to say that the east and south of Britain was wholly dominated by Germanic culture, profound cultural changes were underway. The former civil zone of Britain became a patchwork of differing cultures and identities by the end of the fifth century, with some holding on to vestiges of Roman life, while others were wholly foreign. The sixth century would see the consolidation of these fragmented cultures into broader regional identities, ultimately culminating in the triumph of an unmistakably Germanic "English" identity.

The North and West

Military and Political Institutions

The cultural and economic divide separating Britain into a southeast and a northwest dichotomy has its roots in prehistory. The division into a civil zone in the southeast and a military zone in the northwest dramatically affected the development of Roman civilization in Britain, and in the post-Roman period this divide continued to shape the development of two very different political, economic and cultural models. However, perhaps this should be viewed more as a “contrast”, rather than a “divide”. Instead of inherent differences dividing Britain, the cultural contrasts can be explained by external influences. Each respective half of Britain looked to a different sea, receiving ideas and influences from abroad more than from within. Under this paradigm, the east and south of Britain looked to the Continent and the North Sea for its cultural influences, while the north and west, facing the Atlantic, received an entirely different set of goods and ideas. This model helps to explain the southeast’s ready acceptance of Roman concepts of wealth and power at the end of the Iron Age, as well as its subsequent adoption of North Sea cultural influences at the close of the Roman period. The northwest, by contrast, can be described as more conservative and insular in the time before Rome, being less exposed to the radical new societies forming on the Continent in the first century BCE. Paradoxically, after Britain left Rome in the fifth century, the northwest’s access to the Atlantic trade routes helped preserve more of the Roman way of life than anywhere else in Britain.²⁷⁴

This contrast is immediately apparent when regarding the political institutions of western Britain in the fifth century. While evidence is scarce for governmental structures in the southeast, the west and north of Britain shows both significantly greater continuity with Roman civic structures as well as the creation of new tribal kingdoms. The *civitas* of Viroconium Cornoviorum (Wroxeter) on the Welsh marches persisted through the fifth century and beyond. The evolution of the town's basilica over the fifth century provides evidence of at least a vestigial civic authority. Still in use in the early fifth century, the basilica's roof was removed at some point in the middle of the century and the space turned into an open air market. Decades later, this too was demolished, with the rubble taken away and used for repairs elsewhere in the city, and a large elite residence built in its place sometime in the early sixth century.²⁷⁵ Some sort of civic authority must have directed the labor, which alone is far more evidence for organized activity than exists in major urban sites in the east, such as Londinium or Camulodunum. Combined with the evidence of the continuous occupation of grand town houses, the local elites of the *civitas* must have maintained some form of bureaucratic government, perhaps the "governors" mentioned alongside kings in Gildas' account.²⁷⁶ Viroconium was not unique in this, for the town of Corinium (Cirencester) may also have maintained its provincial government apparatus until the late fifth century²⁷⁷; and an inscription from the town of Penmachno in north Wales demonstrates that Roman magisterial offices were still in existence in the early sixth century.²⁷⁸



Plan detailing the evolution of the town of Viroconium from the first through seventh centuries. Pryor 2005: pg.170

To the south along the Cornish peninsula a decidedly non-Roman political structure emerged in the wake of the Roman military withdrawal from western Britain. On a coastal promontory on the north Cornish coast an impressive defended settlement was constructed in the late fourth century. Known today as Tintagel, the site was defended in the post-Roman period by a series of impressive earthworks and a drystone wall. Within these defenses several elite residences were constructed, along with numerous workshops and storage facilities. The scale of the defensive works as well as the significant finds of

jewelry and high-value metalwork suggests that this was a center of royal residence, perhaps the capital of Dumnonia, the Celtic kingdom which flourished along the Cornish peninsula from the fifth through seventh centuries.²⁷⁹

Within the kingdom of Dumnonia one of the more intriguing phenomena of the post-Roman period was taking place. Across the countryside the long abandoned hill-forts of the Iron Age were being reoccupied and their defenses repaired and rebuilt. Like Tintagel, the presence of luxury goods and military gear suggests that these were the residences of a newly emerging warrior aristocracy. One of the more impressive and best known of these hill-forts sites is Cadbury Congresbury in the modern county of Somerset. Reoccupied in the second half of the fifth century, the earliest phase of occupation at Cadbury Congresbury is marked by a distinctly Romano-British material culture, which included high-quality pottery and glassware. Over time this material culture became gradually impoverished, with metal cooking-ware remaining in use for over a century and old Roman wheel-thrown pots being riveted and reused over generations. Repairs to the fort's walls were made with masonry taken from derelict villas, and there is evidence that third century Roman cremation cemeteries were plundered for their urns, which would have been emptied of their human ash before re-use. Despite this image of extreme material impoverishment, there can be no doubt that hill-forts like Cadbury Congresbury served as both elite residences and fortified refuges in the post-Roman era. By the sixth century substantial additions had been made to the fort's defenses, including the construction of a Roman-style timber watchtower in the center of the fort. A number of larger residential structures were built as well, indicating a ruling elite within the fort, as does the continued importation of jewelry and fine glassware.²⁸⁰

Despite the number of these reoccupied hill-forts which sprang up throughout the countryside of Dumnonia, none seem to have ever become royal residences themselves. The site at Tintagel, however, shows a continuity of elite residence through the seventh century, suggesting that its position as the center of the Dumnonian kingdom remained stable in the post-Roman period. The political organization of Dumnonia is therefore posited to be one of multiple sub-kings or princes, each owing allegiance to an over-king at Tintagel.²⁸¹

A different scenario was emerging at this time to the north in Wales. In the Roman period all of Wales fell under the military government, and had few towns with civil administrations, with Isca Silurum in the southeast of Wales being one of the few exceptions. Following the withdrawal of the Roman military from the west by Magnus Maximus in the late fourth century, governance reverted to the local tribes. No effort was made by the Welsh to utilize any of the disused Roman forts dotting the landscape, but like the British of Dumnonia they opted instead to reoccupy the hill-forts of the Iron Age.²⁸² From the late fourth century on a number of hill-fort sites were refortified at defensible sites both inland and along the coasts, becoming the fortified residences of a newly militarized civilian elite. Unlike the hill-forts of Dumnonia, however, there is evidence that the political centers of Wales, particularly in the north, shifted over time, implying that the various hill-forts competed with each other for regional overlordship. By the sixth century north Wales had coalesced into the kingdom of Gwynedd, which was to maintain military dominance over the region into the Middle Ages.²⁸³

Evidence from northern Britain is far scarcer in this period. As in Wales, northern Britain during the fourth century would have fallen mostly under direct military rule, with only two *civitates*, those of the *Brigantes* at Eboracum and the *Carveti* ("Deer-People") at

Luguvalium, serving as centers of civil administration. In the wake of the rebellion of 409, there seems to have been a systematic abandonment of the forts along Hadrian's Wall. In light of the renewed attacks by the *Picti* just prior to the rebellion, it is not surprising that the remaining *limitanei* opted to abandon their posts in the absence of a diocesan government. With neither pay nor orders coming from the south, there would have been little reason to continue guarding the frontier. However, nearly all the forts of the north were reoccupied in the late fifth through sixth centuries, a clear contrast with the situation in Wales in which no Roman fort shows any evidence for occupation past 400. In most cases, it would seem that the Roman forts were abandoned and remained unoccupied for a length of time, perhaps the space of a generation or two.²⁸⁴

One fort, however, shows signs of continuous occupation throughout the fifth century. The fort of Birdoswald on the western end of Hadrian's Wall, just northeast of the *civitas* of Luguvalium, may have remained in use from the fourth through seventh centuries. In the late Roman period a sizeable *vicus* (civilian town) grew up around the fort. Over the course of the fifth century a number of modifications were made to the fort, with one of its granaries retrofitted for occupation, and a church constructed inside the fort walls. The most significant alteration was the construction of a grand timber "hall" just inside the western gate. Its position ensured that it was the first thing a visitor to the fort would see upon entering, and its size would have made an immediate impression upon any who saw it. Taken together with the discovery of a number of "high-status" objects, such as glassware and jewelry, this timber hall undoubtedly served as an elite residence.²⁸⁵ By the end of the fifth century the old Roman stone walls of the fort were dismantled, with new timber defenses built in their place, and the fort shows signs of serving as a communal center into the sixth century and beyond.²⁸⁶

Despite this, Birdoswald seems to have been the exception among the forts along Hadrian's Wall, and it too may have suffered a period of disuse in the early fifth century.²⁸⁷ This widespread abandonment of the fort system implies a severe collapse of governmental organization, which should not be surprising considering that nearly the whole of the north was completely under military rule in the Roman period. Without the Roman military, there simply was no governmental apparatus to take its place. Birdoswald, just outside the *civitas* of Luguvalium, may have been co-opted by the local civilian administration, but it seems to have been unique in this. However, by the sixth century most of the forts were reoccupied, and the old Roman roads were being repaired throughout the north. Most rural settlements from the sixth century on seem to have been undefended, suggesting that matters of defense were undertaken on a territorial rather than local basis. This may have been the genesis of the Celtic kingdom of Rheged first mentioned in Welsh poetry²⁸⁸, which coalesced in the northwest of Britain in the mid-sixth century and comprised the territories of both the *Carveti* and the *Brigantes*, implying a powerful regional authority in the sixth century north.²⁸⁹

These examples amply demonstrate the variance in governmental structures in the west and north of Britain following the expulsion of the imperial administration in the early fifth century. While some evidence exists for the survival of Roman-style civic authorities in the West Country and parts of Wales, it seems that kingship, based around the old Roman *civitates*, was the norm in the post-Roman period. The contrast with the east and south is clear, in that these areas lacked any sort of regional authority in the fifth century, with no evidence of either kings or magistrates ruling in the wake of the expulsion of the diocesan government.

Economy and Polity

As in the former civil zone of the south and east, the countryside of the military zone in the north and west was dominated by agriculture. With the exception of the massive upland grain plantations used to supply the Roman military forts of the highland zone, most agricultural activity during the Roman period remained much as it had been during the Iron Age, with subsistence farming, mixed grain production and animal husbandry remaining the standard practice. After the collapse of the Roman government in Britain, agriculture continued much as it always had in the military zone. Although pollen analysis exhibits widespread agricultural disruption in northern Britain during the fifth century, likely due to the abandonment of the military grain fields, in other areas of the military zone agriculture remained stable, and even experienced moderate expansion in the immediate post-Roman period.²⁹⁰

Because of this agricultural continuity, rural settlement in the west appears to have been stable during the fifth century. While evidence for the north is scanty, villages and farms in Wales and the Cornish peninsula experienced little change after Rome's departure from Britain. In the kingdom of Dumnonia the standard rural settlement was what is known as the Cornish "round", a small cluster of farmhouses surrounded by a low turf or drystone wall. This settlement type was widely distributed across the western peninsula in the Iron Age and continued to be the typical rural dwelling through the fifth century. Archaeology does not show significant changes to or disruption of these rural sites, and no foreign presence can be inferred.²⁹¹

In Wales two types of rural settlement dominated the countryside. The first was similar to the enclosed settlements of Dumnonia, but seem to have been the dwellings of a rural upper-class, perhaps a Welsh equivalent of the medieval yeomanry. These sites are

typified by large rectilinear houses, surrounded by low stone walls in a manner similar to those in Dumnonia, and possess comparatively rich material finds. It is theorized that during the Roman period these settlements were inhabited by prosperous farmers who had access to the Roman markets, and their sites may have served as centers for tax collection for the Roman military. Their prosperity is clear when compared to the second category of rural sites in Wales, the unenclosed rural farms. These were generally comprised of smaller huts and exhibit a distinctly poorer material culture, with few items of Roman manufacture and no signs of status display. In the post-Roman period both these settlement types show continuity through the fifth and sixth centuries, with only a decrease in Roman material goods marking them out from previous eras. As in Dumnonia, this implies substantial rural stability beyond the end of the Roman administration.²⁹²

The only area in the military zone of Britain, indeed in all of Britain that suffered from significant agricultural and rural discontinuity is the north. The north appears to have experienced a distinct decline in land usage over the course of the fifth century, which is likely related to the abandonment of Roman military installations across the north. This would have eliminated the need for the large grain systems employed in previous centuries to supply the garrisons, and it would appear that the local communities did not take them over. If the early fifth century saw a renewal of attacks by *Picti* from Caledonia, the absence of Roman soldiers in the north would have left the landscape undefended from their raiding. Though the decline in the overall economy of Britain in the fifth century may have made gold and silver scarce for pillaging *Picti*, cattle and slaves would have still been in abundance, which are more directly useful for tribal agricultural communities than precious metals and luxury items.

Over the course of the fifth century mining retained its importance to the economy of western Britain, although operations continued at a reduced scale. Lead ingots, stamped with the mark of the *Deceangli* of north-east Wales, continued to be produced and distributed in western Britain during the fifth century. The most important metal produced in Britain in the post-Roman period was not lead, however, but tin. The tin mines of Cornwall had been the cornerstone of trade between Britain and the Continent in prehistoric times²⁹³, and the tin trade continued to link western Britain to Gaul and the Mediterranean world in the fifth century. Tin occurs only rarely in southern Europe, and its bounty in Britain was well known. Called “the British metal”, tin was highly sought after as a key component in bronze, which continued to be manufactured in high quantities in late Antiquity.²⁹⁴ Byzantine merchants therefore made a point of developing and maintaining trade links with western Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries, trading high quality pottery, glass, amphorae of wine and olive oil and other aspects of Romanitas that were no longer available in Britain. Many coastal settlements in the kingdom of Dumnonia served as trading centers for these Roman goods, trading tin produced in the interior to Byzantine ships and distributing the received luxury goods to the elite hill-forts of the hinterland.²⁹⁵

The tin trade allowed western Britain to enjoy a relatively healthy economy when compared to the total economic collapse of the east, and this in turn allowed for a far greater degree of urban continuity in the west. At the town of Corinium grand townhouses were still being constructed and repaired well into the fifth century, and wear on the paving of the town forum shows it was still in heavy use at this time. Outside the city walls the Roman amphitheatre was turned into a defensive site, and the town cemetery was receiving new burials throughout the fifth century. At Glevum Mediterranean pottery shards and a

Roman coin dated to the year 440 show that the town was still involved in international trade²⁹⁶, while at Aquae Sulis the city streets were repaved sometime in the first quarter of the fifth century.²⁹⁷

The town of Viroconium was another western British site that shows evidence of continued economic activity during this period. At least one, and possibly several, Christian churches were constructed inside the town in the fifth century, and the reuse of the town's basilica as an open air market indicates that the town continued to serve as a commercial focus for the surrounding area.²⁹⁸ The most impressive evidence of the continued importance of Viroconium in the post-Roman period comes from the mid-sixth century, when the remaining stone structures inside the walls were demolished and the entire town center reconstructed from timber, with the town remaining occupied into the middle of the seventh century.²⁹⁹

Manufacturing activity at these and other towns in the west persisted through the fifth century, but at a greatly reduced level. Metalworking continued, in both an industrial capacity as well as the creation of luxury items, including the penannular brooches typical of fifth and sixth century western Britain, as well as copper "hanging-bowls", typically decorated with Christian symbols.³⁰⁰ Pottery represents a major disjunction with the Roman past, as it appears that the western British did not manufacture pottery on any scale after the Roman period. The "grass-fired" pottery typical of the southeast is only rarely found in the west, suggesting that it was traded in rather than produced locally. It is unclear what exactly the western British were using for their ceramics, though there is evidence that existing wares from the Roman period were repeatedly "riveted" over time. Viroconium in particular seems to have been a center for this repair-industry.³⁰¹ The continual repairing may have allowed the fragile pots of an earlier era to remain in use for

an extended period of time, perhaps into the sixth century, though it does not seem possible that this practice could have fully supplied a population that had become accustomed to the ready availability of large quantities of mass-produced wares. One is reminded of the residents of Cadbury Congresbury raiding pagan Roman cemeteries for funerary urns.

Despite this diminution in manufacturing activity, town life survived in the military zone to a far greater degree than it did anywhere in the civil zone. The one exception to this was the city of Eboracum, former provincial capital of Britannia Secunda and the center of the Roman military administration in the north. At some point in the early fifth century the city was abandoned in a manner similar to Londinium in the south, and lay empty long enough to be reclaimed by the surrounding marshland. The remains of the early fifth century Roman structures were steadily covered in accumulating layers of mud and organic debris, and excavation of the post-Roman site has revealed the remains of numerous animal species distinct to the northern wetlands, such as froghoppers, water voles, weasels, field mice and shrews, all of which are missing from the earlier layers.³⁰² This is indicative of a sudden and total desertion of the site as the collapse of the imperial military structure, combined with the failing economy of the fifth century, would have dealt a death blow to the social fabric of the city. With few remaining soldiers its walls would have been indefensible, and with money no longer coming into the city through trade or industry, there may simply have been no compelling reason for anyone to stay.

Although the towns of western Britain enjoyed continued occupation and commercial activity, the question remains whether life inside their walls, or anywhere else in the west for that matter, retained a recognizably Roman character through the fifth century. The issue of cultural continuity is a thornier one than that of economics or habitation, both of which are readily visible in the archaeological record. While certain

aspects of material culture can be seen, this tells us little about how people viewed themselves and the world around them.

Culture and Worship

It has been demonstrated that the west of Britain retained more of the fabric of Roman life than elsewhere in Britain, albeit in a diminished form. This was to prove true of the cultural legacy left by the late Roman Empire. Roman material culture, the Latin language, literacy and the Christian faith all survived in the west in one form or another throughout the fifth century and beyond. The nature of each of these aspects of Roman culture changed to some degree in the years following the collapse of Roman government in Britain, and each became a tool for the ruling classes of the west to legitimize their social position.

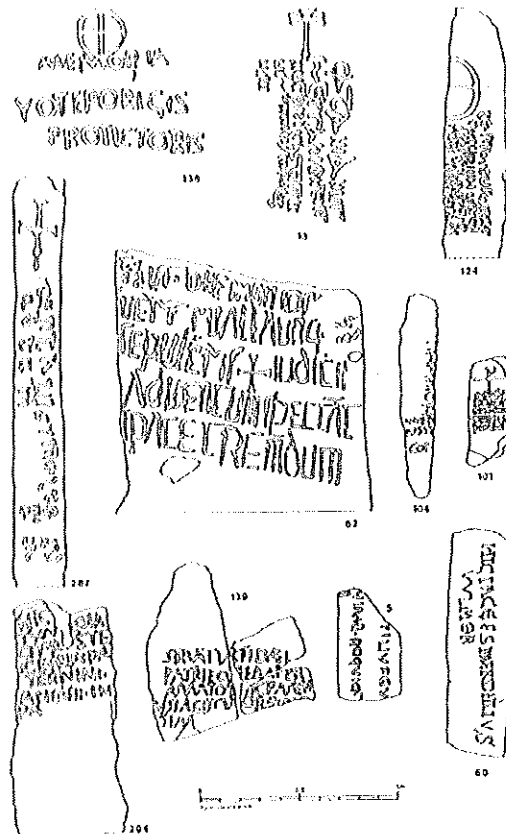
The tin trade out of Dumnonia did much to keep a degree of Roman culture alive in western Britain by keeping the goods and luxury items essential to an elite Roman lifestyle flowing into the post-Roman countryside. Mediterranean pottery in particular was highly sought after by the rulers of western Britain, as insular British culture had become largely aceramic by the late fifth century. Two types of pottery were especially prized, and are found at elite sites across the west. Labeled Phocaean Red Slip Ware (PRSW) and African Red Slip Ware (ARSW), these pottery types were produced in Anatolia and Carthage, respectively, and both types were of very high quality, especially compared with the pottery available in Britain at this time. These pottery types were not common outside of the eastern Mediterranean, making their presence at renovated hill-forts in Britain particularly significant. Where these pottery types are found in Britain they are frequently accompanied by Mediterranean amphorae, which presumably held such luxury foods as

olive oil and wine, both very difficult to come by in Britain.³⁰³ The image of a British warrior aristocracy dwelling in hill-forts and coastal redoubts, drinking Roman wine and eating from Roman plates, hearkens back curiously to the century prior to the Claudian conquest of Britain, the difference being that it was now the post-Roman elite of the southwest, rather than the Iron Age kings of the southeast, which was conspicuously consuming Roman goods. Tremendous efforts were being made to ensure that those who dined with the chiefs and princes of western Britain could have doubt of their Roman heritage.³⁰⁴

While the ruling classes of western Britain used their trade contacts to assert their Roman cultural pedigrees, they had other strategies with which to legitimize their rule. By burying their dead in or close to the Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments that dotted the countryside, they may have sought to lay claim to the ancient heritage of the Isle. This was practiced across Wales, and may have occurred at Tintagel. It is unlikely that the elites buried in these places sought to assert pagan beliefs, but rather were seeking to associate themselves with prominent and permanent features of the landscape.³⁰⁵ By burying their dead in and around the standing stones and barrows of the British countryside, they may have hoped to legitimize their claims to the lands they ruled, and perhaps too to claim descent from the ancient peoples who may have acquired mythic status in the minds of the common people.³⁰⁶

One cultural practice unique to western Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries was the setting up of inscribed stones across the countryside, either as grave-stones or as territorial markers. Many of these inscribed stones clearly exhibit the Romano-Christian culture of the post-Roman British, being frequently inscribed in Latin and bearing numerous Christian symbols. An inscribed stone in Montgomeryshire, Wales, just to the

west of Viroconium, is known as the “Llanerfyl” stone, and provides excellent evidence for the survival of a personal Roman culture. Erected in the fifth century, its Latin inscription reads as follows: “Here in the tomb lies Rustica, daughter of Paterninus. Aged thirteen. In peace.” The names of the daughter and father are clearly Latin names, and the final benediction “in peace” (*in pace*) is characteristic of Christian tombstones of the era.³⁰⁷



A series of inscribed stones from Wales. The Llanerfyl stone is number 294, in the bottom left corner.

The Llanerfyl stone is not unique in this clear portrayal of Roman identity. Many such stones were erected throughout the south and west in the post-Roman period, and indicate a widespread Latin culture among the rural population. Many of the stones are inscribed in Vulgar Latin, the everyday Latin spoken by the majority of the population of the Roman world, as opposed to the literary Latin of the elite classes. One stone dating from the late sixth century praises a man as “an example to all his fellow citizens”. This use of a characteristically Roman term over a century after the final collapse of the

Western Roman Empire is a particularly striking example of the survival of Roman culture in Britain. On stones across the west Latin names persist through the fifth and sixth centuries, with examples of individuals named “Tribunus”, “Aeternus”, and “Paulinus Marinus” serving as clear examples of a Latin personal culture surviving long after the end of Roman society in Britain.³⁰⁸

Despite their apparent use by non-elites, the majority of inscribed stones were erected by the emerging warrior-aristocracy of the west. In addition to Roman and Christian cultural traits, many of these stones advertise such typical warrior values as heroism, physical strength and fighting prowess, and list impressive genealogies in an effort to emphasize their owner’s noble lineage. Many were placed alongside Roman roads, where they could easily be seen by the people. By evoking connections with the Roman past, the Christian faith and martial culture, and by their prominent display, those who erected these stones sought to emphasize their right and ability to rule. Many of these stones seem to have been left deliberately crude in their shape, perhaps in emulation of the worn Neolithic monuments scattered across the fifth century landscape. It would seem that those who commissioned these stones made every effort to associate themselves with anything and everything which could legitimize their position at the top of the social hierarchy.³⁰⁹

The relatively widespread literacy of the western British population can only have been made possible by the existence of educational facilities. In late Antiquity such an education could only have been received in a religious context. The classical Latin and rhetorical flourishes employed by both St. Patrick and Gildas betray their considerable training, and demonstrate that in the fifth and sixth centuries it was still possible to receive a first-rate education in Britain.³¹⁰ This education would likely have been received at a

monastic school. From the sixth century on monasticism was the primary form of organized Christianity in Britain, setting it apart from the urban-based secular church organization of the Continent.

In the first decades of the fifth century the Roman Church in Britain continued much as it had under Roman administration, and provided Britain with a cultural link to the Continent in the rapidly deteriorating conditions of the late Empire. That the British church remained firmly a part of the Roman world is demonstrated by the journey of the Gallo-Roman bishop Germanus to Britain in 429 to combat the Pelagian heresy gaining popularity in Britain at the time. The fact that Germanus was dispatched to Britain at all demonstrates that the British church was in close contact with its counterpart on the Continent, and that the Roman Church still sought to enforce orthodoxy in a land that had been lost to the Empire for twenty years. The details of Germanus' visit provide historians with valuable evidence of the state of Britain immediately after the revolt of 409.

Germanus and his party were apparently able to travel freely across the countryside, implying that social order still held strong, and made a visit to the shrine of St. Alban at Verulamium. While in Britain he baptized numerous peasants into the Christian faith, and defeated the Pelagian heretics in a theological debate. Despite some fantastical elements to the story of his journey, that Germanus actually went to Britain is not in doubt, and it serves to demonstrate the strength of Christianity in Britain in the early fifth century. At no point is it said or implied that he combated paganism in Britain, a common activity to ascribe to early saints by their biographers, but instead targeted Christian heretics.³¹¹

The church in Britain remained in close contact with Rome until at least the year 454, when Pope Leo I announced a new date for the celebration of Easter, revising earlier calendars and traditions. Though this date was changed once again in the sixth century, the

British church was still using the date computed in 454 when St. Augustine arrived in Kent in the year 597. This implies that at some point between 454 and the early sixth century, the Christian church in Britain fell out of touch with developments on the Continent.³¹²

Although the office of bishop died out in the west as well, from the fifth century on rural monasticism came to replace the urban Christianity of the late Empire, allowing Christianity in the west to develop and flourish independently of contact with the church at Rome. The first monasteries were established in the west in the middle of the fifth century, and were instrumental in bringing Christianity to the rural population. At the beginning of the fifth century the peasantry of the west was far less Christianized than in the east and organized paganism, in the form of rural temples and shrines, was still a powerful cultural force. By the middle of the century there is scant evidence for continuity of organized pagan worship, and Christianity seems to have been the dominant faith in the countryside.³¹³ Many of the new monasteries of western Britain may have been built upon and around the abandoned villas of the rural elite, and taken over their role as centers of agriculture for disparate farming communities. Certain villas in the West Country of Britain served as centers of rural worship in the late fourth century, and some of these may never have been abandoned, but instead became burgeoning religious communities.³¹⁴

Monasticism would define Christianity in Britain until the synod of Whitby in 664 brought the British church back into the mainstream of the Roman church hierarchy.³¹⁵ By building churches throughout the countryside the monks of western Britain brought their faith to the people, and in doing so transformed the culture of the rural population. Their monasteries became centers of learning and preserved much of literate Roman culture in Britain. While St. Patrick is the first and most famous British cleric to preach in Ireland, by the sixth century Britain was sending missionaries across the seas to Ireland and Scotland,

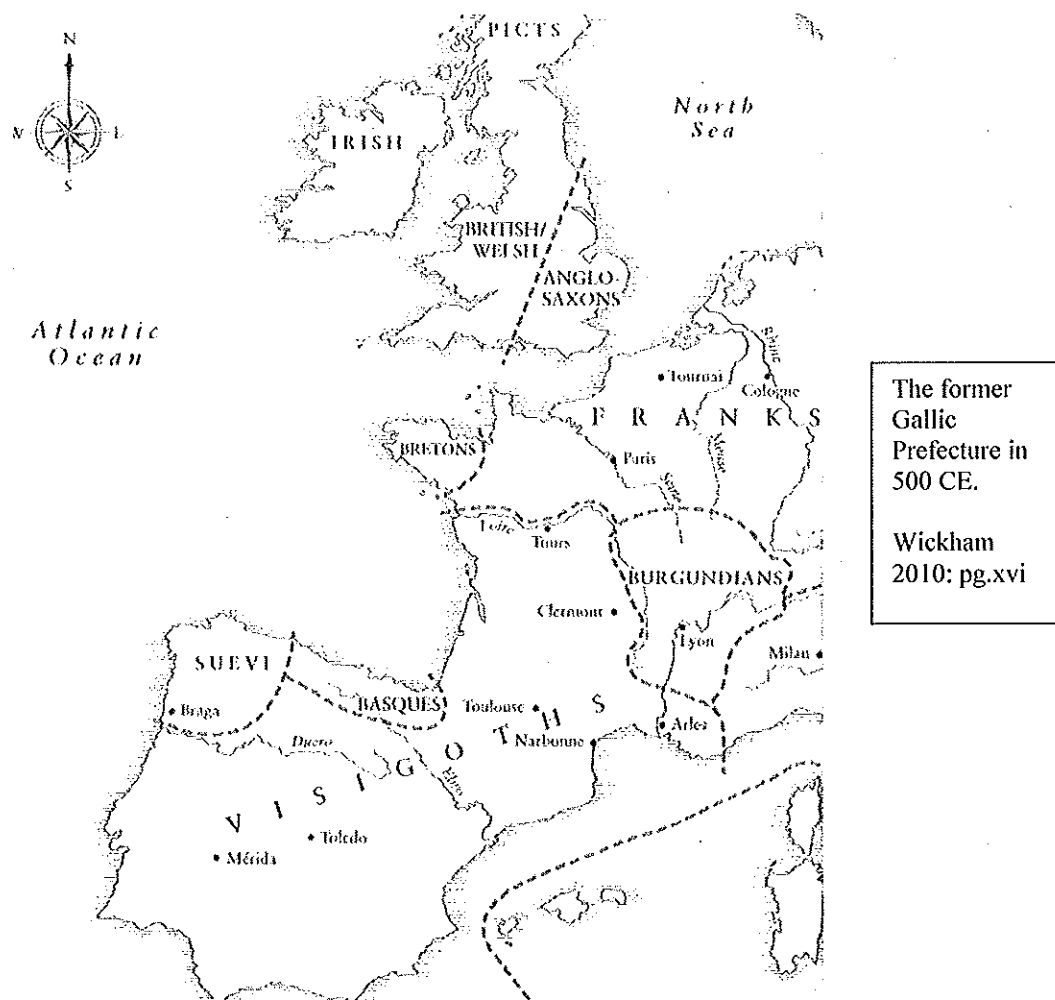
exporting Christian faith to new populations and bringing them into the greater European cultural world.³¹⁶ In these sparsely settled, rural societies, monasticism flourished and would eventually produce some of the greatest works of art in the Celtic world. Intriguingly, the western British appear to have made no effort to evangelize the growing Germanic communities in the east, who would remain staunchly pagan into the early seventh century.³¹⁷

Conclusions

The contrast between the west and east of Britain should by now be obvious. Whereas eastern Britain fragmented into a patchwork of differing cultural identities and almost totally rural societies, the west maintained much that was characteristically Roman, and retained a far more unified culture into the fifth and sixth centuries. Although the Roman military organization was lost, and no attempts were made to revive a coin-based economy, organized Christianity, urban economic activity, literacy and the Latin language all survived in the west into the Early Middle Ages. Through the tin trade contact with the Roman world in the eastern Mediterranean was maintained, which allowed a degree of *Romanitas* to survive in the unlikely settings of the hill-forts of the south and west as local British warlords strove to emulate Roman custom and fashion.

It was this deliberate emulation of Roman culture and identity which truly set the west apart from the east in the post-Roman period, and illustrates clearly the different ways in which Britain was affected by foreign influences. The east saw a considerable influx of Germanic culture from across the Channel and the North Sea as peoples and goods moved back and forth across the waters³¹⁸, bringing new ideas, values and ways of living to Britain over the fifth century. The west looked to more distant shores for its contacts with

the wider world, down the Atlantic corridor beyond Gaul and Hispania to the eastern Mediterranean and the Roman culture which still flourished there. The two halves of Britain were not mutually hostile, however, and trade goods and cultures moved from east to west and back again with surprising fluidity. Nonetheless, two very different cultural zones had solidified in Britain by the sixth century, setting the stage for the endemic conflict that would rage between the Romano-Celtic west and the Germanic east over the following centuries.³¹⁹



Final Thoughts on Britain in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Over the course of this paper numerous preconceptions have been shown to be inaccurate and misleading, from the romantic notion of a vast British wilderness in the pre-Roman Iron Age to theories of an early fourth century decline in prosperity to the persistent myth of the Saxon invasions of the fifth century. Great variation characterized Britain before, during and after the Roman experiment in Britain. From the small pastoral communities of the northwest to the palatial villas and bustling towns of the southeast, from the monks carefully preserving vestiges of culture to the Germanic migrants forging new lives for themselves, to be alive in Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries was a diverse experience.

Yet two essential questions remain concerning the effects of the end of Roman society in Britain. The first concerns the low population of early medieval Britain when compared to other areas of the former Empire. Throughout this paper various population figures have been thrown about for Britain at different points in its history. While figures and statistics are often the bane of constructive discussion in history, at all times the figures presented herein were included in order to present an idea of the pace and tempo of life in Britain, whether seeking to dispel the notion of a Britain dominated by primal wilds before the Romans or to refute hypotheses of decline and decay in Britain in the fourth century. Populations in ancient societies are primarily educated guesswork, however, and those presented in this paper represent the most likely “average” for a given period.

Figures have not been provided for the post-Roman period, though it might be expected that a population estimate would be most useful in refuting notions of Saxon invasion and the hypothesized extermination of the greater part of the British people. Partly this is due

to lack of data, for if estimates are difficult to make with any accuracy regarding the Roman period, they are infinitely more difficult in the murk of Britain after the fall of Roman society. The only measure that exists of early medieval populations in Britain is given in the Domesday Book, the eleventh century account of peoples, villages, farms and woods compiled by the Normans following their conquest of England in 1066. Accounting for the inevitable inaccuracies of a pre-modern census, the Domesday Book gives a population for England somewhere between 1.75 million and 2.25 million individuals. Even though Wales was excluded from this census, its small size and relatively sparse habitation would not substantially add to this estimate. These figures are far below what was reached in Britain in the fourth century. If the figure of 4 million for the fourth century is reasonably accurate, we are looking at a 50% loss from the Roman period. This is even more striking given that England in the middle of the eleventh century had experienced over a hundred years of relatively stable conditions and population growth. Therefore, the population during the early and middle Saxon periods may have been significantly lower than the eleventh century estimates.³²⁰

The loss of 50% of a population is a staggering plunge. If the larger population estimates for Roman Britain are utilized, which range as high as 8 million, we are looking at a demographic collapse of apocalyptic proportions. These figures imply a severe calamity for Britain in the post-Roman period, and cry out for a Saxon invasion to explain them. Yet the archaeological record shows no sign of widespread violence, and excluding the north the pollen record shows substantial agricultural continuity across Britain for the fifth and sixth centuries. Where then did all these people go?

The possibility is that, rather than a catastrophic collapse, the population of Britain declined gradually over the course of the centuries leading up to the Norman invasion. As

farming in Britain returned to a subsistence model, the lack of surpluses year after year may have seen a slow, steady decline in population over the centuries. There is evidence that the climate in Britain became cooler and wetter from the fifth century on³²¹, resulting in steadily shrinking harvests over time. Poor nutrition would have kept immune systems weak, and the trade ships coming into the west from the Mediterranean may have carried diseases, such as the plague of Justinian which ravaged Europe in the middle of the sixth century. Disease and diminishing harvests, over time, would have produced a significant drop in population, with the endemic warfare which characterized Anglo-Saxon society in the sixth through tenth centuries accounting for the rest.

The second question concerns the sudden florescence of Romano-Christian culture in the west of Britain, an area which had only the thinnest veneer of Roman civilization prior to the collapse of the Roman government in Britain. At the start of the fifth century it was the east of Britain, the civil zone of the Roman diocese, which had the most robustly Roman culture. Villa economies, Christianity, urban life and Roman material culture defined this area from the second century on, right up until the end of the Roman administration in Britain.

In the west, the opposite was the case. In the military zone of Britain virtually nothing of Roman culture seems to have existed before the fifth century. Material culture remained impoverished and essentially Celtic, with religious practice remaining invisible in the archaeological record. The Roman military dominated the western landscape with its networks of forts, roads and legionary bases, to the effect that the indigenous Britons interacted with the Roman world primarily through the unequal context of a subject population to a military government. This can hardly have been a beneficial dynamic to the western tribes, and it seems unlikely that they would have witnessed much of Roman

culture that was worth emulating, except perhaps the overwhelming power of the Roman army.

Why then did so much of Roman culture come to be adopted in the west, and so quickly after the fall of the Roman government at Londinium? It is possible that the western tribes were witness to more of the refined aspects of Roman society than is generally supposed. People were not immobilized in their local communities in the ancient world any more than they are now, and it is likely that many western Britons may have travelled east into the civil zone and had some experience of the opulence and splendor of Roman society, without the presence of the Roman army looming ominously over every aspect of life. When the Roman military withdrew from the west, the British tribes perhaps sought to adopt the trappings of a culture of wealth and power that they had been excluded from.

This hypothesis seems lacking, however. It is not enough to say that the western tribes were denied Roman culture, but rather they appear to have actively resisted it for centuries.³²² Why then would the tribal elites go to such lengths to appear Roman in the post-Roman period, and why would their people come to associate themselves so closely with Rome that they would adopt Latin names? It seems clear that the effort made by the elites to appear Roman was made to legitimize the new social order emerging in the west in the wake of the Roman military withdrawal. The reasons why, when they could simply have relied on their indigenous models of chieftainship, remain uncertain. It would seem that the old Celtic culture had simply lost its relevance in terms of ideals of power and control.

And yet the British of the west were only barely Romanized by the end of the fourth century. Why should their Celtic past fail to resonate with their aspirations to

kingship, a form of rule far more similar to their Iron Age heritage than to the Roman culture they were aping? Perhaps it was simply that Roman culture was more immediate in the world around them, more readily visible and imposing, and its all too easily remembered brutality and power more useful to tribal elites seeking to impose their will on a countryside suddenly bereft of central authority. While this is likely part of the story, I believe that there is something else at work in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Roman economy.

The theory that the urban elites of the Roman civil zone in Britain may have fled to the Continent in substantial numbers, settling in Gaul and Hispania in the fifth and sixth centuries, has been already mentioned. To take this emigration hypothesis further, I think it possible that some of the urban and rural population of eastern Britain may have simply fled westward to the former military zone. In a manner similar to the Saxons, who perhaps came to British shores chasing rumors of a countryside free of taxes and kings, some of the Romano-British elite may have headed west seeking such still-functioning towns as Viroconium and Corinium, as well as places where organized Christianity was still possible. There some of them could have imposed themselves as the new Roman rulers and landlords of a dispersed, non-Romanized peasantry. The considerable efforts made by the rulers of the hill-forts in the west to appear as Roman as possible make a good deal of sense if one considers that they were working to take the place of the departed Roman military administration in the minds of the local peoples. Local tribal elites could follow this model as well, seeking to appear as Roman as these newcomers as they sought to lay claim to their own territories. Others may have simply settled down in the countryside, attending the rural churches established by the monasteries, bringing their produce to the town markets and sending their children to monastic schools to learn their Latin. None of

these things would have been possible in the east of Britain, which may have been motivation enough for people to pack up and flee westward.

This, like so much else pertaining to Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries, is largely conjecture, but it is borne out of considerable research and does much to explain the sudden transference of the Roman cultural heartland in Britain from east to west. Combined with the hypothesis of slowly failing agricultural returns, this offers a blueprint as to how Britain in the Early Middle Ages became a sparsely inhabited land when compared with its Roman and pre-Roman pasts, as well as why a major transference of culture westward occurred in the wake of the end of the Roman state in Britain. This movement of culture and power westward is known as *translatio studii et imperii*, the transfer of culture and power. While often considered to be a literary trope, it seems well suited to the situation in Britain in the fifth century.

The British people witnessed profound changes to their lives and cultures over the fourth and fifth centuries. By 500 CE, large segments of the British population had experienced upheavals to their societies and ways of life that would have made their world all but unrecognizable to their ancestors at the beginning of the fourth century. In the year 300 Britain stood at the beginning of the greatest period of peace and prosperity it would enjoy before the modern era. Even at the start of the fifth century few people in Britain could have doubted their future as a part of the Roman world, a world which, despite its problems, must have seemed unshakeable in its foundations. Crises had come and gone throughout the Empire's history, and with the protection of the Christian God the Empire could face its trials with confidence. That it was Constantine who gave the Empire this glorious new faith must have been a point of pride for many in Britain, for it was at

Eboracum in the British north that Constantine was made emperor by his own troops, and it was from Britain that Christianity had spread forth into the Roman world.

Two hundred years after Constantine's reign the Western Empire lay in ruins, and Britain had passed out of all recognition from the of its fourth century Golden Age. Eboracum, the spring from which Roman Christianity flowed into the Empire, was sinking back into the cold bogs of the north. Many of Britain's cities were rotting hulks, its villas had been reclaimed by the fields, and a distinctly non-Roman Germanic culture was taking hold in the east. Yet in the west a part of Rome lingered on, and its learning, literature and religion flourished and grew into new forms. If the Empire was dead in Britain, the best of it was carried on by a part of its people, who preserved much for future generations to enjoy. Another part of the British people were busily forging a new identity, which would one day spread its own language and culture across the world.

The fifth century in Britain has often been viewed as a time of collapse and decay, in which much of what was beautiful and grand in the West was lost forever. While it is true that a great deal of what was Rome died in Britain, much survived, while at the same time the beginnings of a new cultural world were being born. The fusion of a Classical heritage with new culture from the Germanic world would create an entirely new civilization in Britain. The fourth century had seen a Golden Age, while the fifth had seen both the death of one civilization, and the genesis of a new one. Roman Britain may have died, but the seeds were planted for the birth of England.

Endnotes

Myth and Misconception

¹ Dark, Ken. *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire*. Stroud, The History Press 2010, pg. 12

² Francis Pryor posits a fundamental continuity of British culture and settlement following the collapse of the Roman administration, while Ken Dark argues for substantial urban continuity and international political and economic contacts in the post-Roman period.

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³This is the standard delineation for the last pre-Roman historical period. Pryor, Francis. *Britain BC: Life in Britain and Ireland Before the Romans*. London: Harper Perennial Press 2004, pg. 368

⁴ Pryor, Francis. *Britain AD: The Quest for Arthur, England and the Anglo-Saxons*. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005.

⁵Ibid, pgs. 191-92 and Mattingly, David. *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire*. London: Penguin Books, 2007, pgs. 363-64.

⁶ Ibid, pgs. 50 & 364-366

⁷ Ibid, pg. 368

⁸ Pryor 2004: pgs. 335 & 414

⁹ Salway, Peter. *A History of Roman Britain*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, pg. 396

¹⁰Ibid pgs. 54-56 and Salway 1993: pg. 13

¹¹ Pryor 2004: pg. 417

¹² Ibid

¹³ Pryor, 2004: pgs. 420-422

¹⁴ Mattingly 2007: pgs. 57-59 & Salway 1993: pg. 17

¹⁵ Mattingly 2007: pgs. 56-57

¹⁶Ibid, pgs. 56-64 & 80, & Salway 1993: pg. 14

¹⁷ Salway 1993: pg. 40 & Mattingly 2007: pg. 64

¹⁸ Mattingly 2007: pg. 59 & Pryor 2005: pg. 52

¹⁹ Salway 1993: pgs. 22-23

²⁰ Ibid, pgs. 28-30

²¹ Mattingly 2007: pgs 65-66

²²Ibid, pg. 67

²³Ibid, pgs. 68-70

²⁴ Ibid, pgs. 68-72 & Salway 1993: pgs. 32-33

²⁵ Ibid, pgs. 68-73

²⁶ Salway, 1993: pgs. 36-37

²⁷ Salway, 1993: 44

²⁸ "Glory in war exceeds all other forms of success. This is the origin of the Roman people's reputation, this is what ensures our city will have eternal fame, this has compelled the world to submit to her rule"-M. Tullius Cicero, Ibid, pg. 45. *His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono; imperium sine fine dedi*: "For them [the Romans] I set limits of neither time nor space; I have given to them Empire without end"-P. Vergilius Maro, *The Aeneid*, Book I, lines 277-278.

²⁹ Ibid, pgs. 100-105

³⁰ Ibid, pg. 93

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³¹ Tacitus. *Agricola and Germania*. Trans. Harold Mattingly. London, Penguin Books 2009, pg. 15.21

³²Ibid, pg. 265

³³ De la Bedoyere 2010: pg. 96

³⁴ Mattingly, 2007: pgs. 260-261

³⁵ Salway 1993: pg. 91

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³⁹ Salway 1993: pg. 144
⁴⁰ Heather, Peter. *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. Oxford University Press 2006, pg. 64
⁴¹ De la Bedoyere 2010: pg. 65
⁴² Salway 1993: pg. 179
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⁴⁴ Ibid, pg. 566
⁴⁵ Salway 1993: pg. 189
⁴⁶ Southern, Pat. "The Army in Late Roman Britain". *A Companion to Roman Britain*, ed. Malcom Todd, Blackwell Publishing 2007, pg. 396
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⁴⁸ Ibid, pg. 65
⁴⁹ Southern 2007: pg. 397
⁵⁰ Mattingly 2007: pgs. 231-232
⁵¹ Cleary, Simon Esmonde. "Britain in the Fourth Century." *A Companion to Roman Britain*, ed. Malcom Todd, pg. 410
⁵² De la Bedoyere 2010: pgs. 70-71
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⁵³ Ibid, pg. 73
⁵⁴ Salway 1993: pg. 227
⁵⁵ Ibid, pg. 231

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⁵⁷ Ibid, pgs. 207-210
⁵⁸ Southern 2007: pg. 401
⁵⁹ Mattingly 2007: pg. 227
⁶⁰ Salway 1993: pg. 240
⁶¹ Ibid, pg. 228
⁶² Southern, 2007: pg. 393
⁶³ Salway 1993: pg. 241
⁶⁴ Mattingly 2007: pg. 228
⁶⁵ Southern 2007: pg. 401
⁶⁶ Alcock, Leslie. *Arthur's Britain*, Penguin Press, London, 1971, pg. 286
⁶⁷ Salway 1993: pg. 239 & 242-243
⁶⁸ Mattingly 2007: pg. 241
⁶⁹ Alcock 1971: pg. 94
⁷⁰ Mattingly 2007: pg. 249
⁷¹ Southern 2007: pg. 395
⁷² De la Bedoyere 2010: pg. 129
⁷³ Mattingly 2007: pg. 245
⁷⁴ Southern 2007: pg. 396
⁷⁵ Mattingly 2007: pg. 242
⁷⁶ Pryor 2005: pg. 137
⁷⁷ Salway 1993: pg. 191 & 447-448
⁷⁸ Pryor 2005: pgs. 137-143
⁷⁹ Mattingly 2007: pg. 244
⁸⁰ Salway 1993: pg. 235
⁸¹ Mattingly 2007: pgs. 170-171
⁸² Ibid, pg. 238
⁸³ Ibid, pgs. 131 & 239
⁸⁴ Ibid, pg. 247
⁸⁵ Salway 1993: pg. 240
⁸⁶ Mattingly 2007: pg. 246

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⁸⁸ Pryor 2005: pg. 72
⁸⁹ De la Bedoyere 2010: pg. 131
⁹⁰ Mattingly 2007: pg. 422
⁹¹ Mattingly 2007: 356 & De la Bedoyere 2010: pg. 182
⁹² Salway 1993: pg. 448
⁹³ Heather 2006: pg. 113
⁹⁴ Mattingly 2007: pg. 366
⁹⁵ Salway 1993: pg. 452
⁹⁶ Pryor 2005: pg. 142
⁹⁷ De la Bedoyere 2010: pg. 189
⁹⁸ Salway 1993: pg. 454
⁹⁹ Salway 1993: pgs. 450-452
¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pg. 449
¹⁰¹ Mattingly 2007: pg 494
¹⁰² Ibid, pg. 455 & 459
¹⁰³ Mattingly 2007: pg. 523
¹⁰⁴ Salway 1993: pg. 459
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¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pg.318
¹⁰⁷ Ibid, pg. 320
¹⁰⁸ Salway 1993: pg. 466
¹⁰⁹ Hobbs, Richard and Jackson, Ralph. *Roman Britain*. London, The British Museum Press 2010, pg. 89
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¹¹¹ Salway 1993:
¹¹² De la Bedoyere 2010: pg 170 & Mattingly 2007: pg. 515-517
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¹¹⁴ Mattingly 2007: pg. 323
¹¹⁵ Salway 1993: 446
¹¹⁶ Mattingly 2007 & Pryor 2005
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¹¹⁸ Heather 2006: pgs. 113 & 504
¹¹⁹ Mattingly 2007: pg. 356
¹²⁰ Ibid, pg. 368
¹²¹ Pryor 2005: pgs. 192-193
¹²² Mattingly 2007: pg. 370-371
¹²³ Salway 1993: pgs. 237 & 430-431
¹²⁴ Hingley 2007: pgs. 342-343
¹²⁵ Mattingly 2007: pg. 422
¹²⁶ Alcock 1971: pg. 167
¹²⁷ Pryor 2005: pg. 129
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¹³⁰ De la Bedoyere 2010: pg. 155
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¹⁴⁴ Ibid, pgs. 336-338
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¹⁶⁴ Ibid, pg. 521
¹⁶⁵ Hobbs & Jackson 2011: pg. 131
¹⁶⁶ Pryor 2004: Ch. 12
¹⁶⁷ Salway 1993: pg. 506
¹⁶⁸ Mattingly 2007: pg. 521-522
¹⁶⁹ Ibid, pg. 348
¹⁷⁰ Hobbs & Jackson 2011: pgs. 136-137
¹⁷¹ Salway 1993: pgs. 532-533
¹⁷² Ibid, pg. 530
¹⁷³ Heather 2006: pg. 121
¹⁷⁴ Mattingly 2007: pgs. 345-347 & De la Bedoyere 2010: pg. 244
¹⁷⁵ Salway 1993: pgs. 250-251
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¹⁸² Ibid, pg. 257
¹⁸³ Ibid, pg. 262-263
¹⁸⁴ De la Bedoyere 2010: pg. 231
¹⁸⁵ Dark 2010: pg. 20
¹⁸⁶ Salway 1993: pg. 267
¹⁸⁷ Pryor 2005: pg. 114-115

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¹⁸⁹ Mattingly 2007: pgs. 235-237
¹⁹⁰ Mattingly 2007: pg. 237
¹⁹¹ Alcock 1971: pg. 96 & 123
¹⁹² Heather 2006: pg. xi
¹⁹³ Salway 1993: pg. 313
¹⁹⁴ Salway 1993: pgs. 315-316
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¹⁹⁶ Heather 2004: pg. 194
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²⁰⁸ Alcock 1971: pgs. 90-91
²⁰⁹ Mattingly 2007: pg. 532
²¹⁰ Dark 2010: pg. 29
²¹¹ Heather 2006: pgs. 80-84
 *The Latin word meaning "Germans", though not in the modern sense of the nation-state of Germany. I have borrowed this catch-all term for the various tribes of *Germania* from D.H. Green.
²¹² Dark 2010: pgs. 48-51
²¹³ Alcock 1971: pg. 106
²¹⁴ Gildas. *On the Ruin of Britain (De Excidio Britanniae)*. Trans. J.A. Giles, Dodo Press, pg.13.20
²¹⁵ Ibid, pg. 16.23
²¹⁶ Campbell 1991: pg. 23
²¹⁷ Salway 1993: pgs. 336-338
²¹⁸ Mattingly 2007: pg. 533
²¹⁹ Salway 1993: pg. 339
²²⁰ Dark 2010: pgs. 99-101
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²²⁶ Ibid, pg. 144
²²⁷ Pryor 2004: pgs. 196-197
²²⁸ Dark 2010: pg. 55
²²⁹ Mattingly 2007: pgs. 530-531
²³⁰ Salway 1993: pgs. 352-353
²³¹ Alcock 1971: pg. 200
²³² Salway 1993: 352
²³³ Dark 2010: pgs. 100-101
²³⁴ Alcock 1971: pgs. 185-186
²³⁵ Salway 1993: pg. 431
²³⁶ Dark 2010: pg. 33
²³⁷ Alcock 1971: pg. 192

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²⁴⁸ Fleming 2010: pg. 43
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²⁵² Alcock 1971: pg. 285
²⁵³ Dark 2010: pg. 88
²⁵⁴ Ibid, pgs. 71-72
²⁵⁵ Fleming 2010: pg. 45
²⁵⁶ Ibid, pg. 45
²⁵⁷ Dark 2010: pg. 74-75 & 90
²⁵⁸ Ibid, pg. 71
²⁵⁹ Fleming 2010: pgs. 45-47
²⁶⁰ Dark 2010: pg. 77
²⁶¹ Alcock 1971: pg. 290
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²⁶⁴ Ibid, pg. 79
²⁶⁵ Fleming 2010: pg. 46
²⁶⁶ Dark 2010: pgs. 97-100
²⁶⁷ Fleming 2010: pg. 123, 127 & 133
²⁶⁸ Fleming 2010: pg. 126
²⁶⁹ Dark 2010: pg. 58
²⁷⁰ Tacitus 2009: pg. 39
²⁷¹ Green, D.H. *Language and History in the Early Germanic World*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1998, pgs. 15-16 & 21-25
²⁷² Dark 2010: pgs. 84-85
²⁷³ Ibid, pg. 60
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²⁷⁶ Dark 2010: pg. 147
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²⁸⁰ Fleming 2010: pgs. 32-34
²⁸¹ Dark 2010: pg. 164
²⁸² Alcock 1971: pg. 179-180
²⁸³ Dark 2010: pg.
²⁸⁴ Ibid, pg. 196
²⁸⁵ Pryor 2005: pgs. 201-202
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²⁹⁹ Pryor 2005: pgs. 169-171
³⁰⁰ Dark 2010: pgs. 132-134
³⁰¹ Pryor 2005: pg. 172
³⁰² Fleming 2010: pg. 28
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³⁰⁴ Fleming 2010: pg. 34
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³⁰⁶ Fleming 2010: pgs. 93-94
³⁰⁷ Alcock 1971: pg. 240
³⁰⁸ Fleming 2010: pg. 84
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