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The Britons in late antiquity
power, identity and ethnicity

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THE BRITONS IN LATE ANTIQUITY:

POWER, IDENTITY AND ETHNICITY

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Summary

This study focuses on the creation of both British ethnic or 'national' identity and Brittonic

regional/dynastic identities in the Roman and early medieval periods. It is divided into two

interrelated sections which deal with a broad range of textual and archaeological evidence. Its

starting point is an examination of Roman views of the inhabitants of the island of Britain and

how ethnographic images were created in order to define the population of Britain as

barbarians who required the civilising influence of imperial conquest. The discussion here seeks to elucidate, as far as possible, the extent to which the Britons were incorporated into the provincial framework and subsequently ordered and defined themselves as an imperial people. This first section culminates with discussion of Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*. It seeks to illuminate how Gildas attempted to create a new identity for his contemporaries which, though to a certain extent based on the foundations of Roman-period Britishness, situated his *gens* uniquely amongst the peoples of late antique Europe as God's *familia*.

The second section of the thesis examines the creation of regional and dynastic identities and the emergence of kingship amongst the Britons in the late and immediately post-Roman periods. It is largely concerned to show how interaction with the Roman state played a key role in the creation of early kingships in northern and western Britain. The argument stresses that while there were claims of continuity in group identities in the late antique period, the socio-political units which emerged in the fifth and sixth centuries were new entities. Indeed, it will emphasise that there was no return or re-emergence of a primitive form of kingship influenced by deep-seated notions of Celtic-ness. Rather, this study demonstrates that regional Brittonic groups participated in the broader cultural and socio-political transformations that mark out the late antique period across the western provinces of the failing Roman empire.

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List of Abbreviations

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ASE: *Anglo-Saxon England*

AC : *Archaeologia Cambrensis*

Arnold and Davies, *REMW*: C. J. Arnold and J. L. Davies, *Roman and Early Medieval Wales* (Stroud, 2000)

BAR Brit. Ser: British Archaeological Reports, British Series

BAR Int. Ser: British Archaeological Reports, International Series

BBCS: *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*

Bede, *HE*: Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969)

Blockley, *FCHLRE*: *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, ed. and trans. R. C. Blockley, ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 10 (Cambridge, 2007)

CMCS: *Cambrian/Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*

Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*: T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064* (Oxford, 2013)

CQ: *Classical Quarterly*

Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*: K. R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity, 300-800* (Leicester, 1994)

Dark, *Britain*: K. R. Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* (Stroud, 2000)

Davies, *Wales*: W. Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982)

Edwards, *Corpus II*: N. Edwards, *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales, Volume II: South-West Wales* (Cardiff, 2007)

Edwards, *Corpus III*: N. Edwards, *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales, Volume III: North Wales* (Cardiff, 2013)

EHR: *English Historical Review*

EME: *Early Medieval Europe*

Find from the Frontier: *Finds from the Frontier: Material Culture in the 4th and 5th Centuries*, ed. by R. Collins and L. Allason-Jones, CBA Research Reports 162 (York, 2010)

Gildas, *DEB*: *De Excidio Britanniae*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom, *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents*, Arthurian Sources Vol. 7 (Chichester, 1978)

GNA: *Gildas New Approaches*, ed. by M. Lapidge and D. N. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1984)

HB: *Historia Brittonum*, ed. and trans. J. Morris, *Nennius: British History and The Welsh Annals*, Arthurian Sources Vol. 8 (Chichester, 1980)

HG: Harleian Genealogies, in *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, ed. by P. Bartrum (Cardiff, 1966)

JLA: *Journal of Late Antiquity*

JRS: *Journal of Roman Studies*

Jones, *LRE*: A. H. M. Jones, *The LAter Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (3 vols., Oxford, 1964)

MA: *Medieval Archaeology*

NH: *Northern History*

OJA: *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*

Pan. Lat: *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*, ed. and trans. C. E. V. Nixon and and B. S. Rogers with the Latin text of R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1994)

P&P: *Past and Present*

PSAS: *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland*

Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus I*: M. Redknap and J. M. Lewis, *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales, Volume I: South-East Wales* (Cardiff, 2007)

Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*: A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1981)

RIB: R. G. Collingwood and R. P. Wright, *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain, Volume I: Inscriptions on Stones* (Oxford, 1965); R. S. O. Tomlin, R. P. Wright and M. W. C. Hassall, *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain, Volume III: Inscriptions on Stone* (Oxford, 2009)

SC: *Studia Celtica*

SHR: *Scottish Historical Review*

TCWAAS: *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*

TRHS: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*

WA: *World Archaeology*

White, *Britannia Prima*: R. White, *Britannia Prima: Britain's Last Roman Province* (Stroud, 2007)

WHR: *Welsh History Review*

Note on Translations:

Where an authoritative translation of either a Latin or Welsh source exists, I have used that given by the editors, as, for instance, with the Latin panegyrics in praise of later Roman emperors or Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*. This, of course, extends to the quotes from Greek authors such as Cassius Dio and Herodian, where only the modern English translations are cited. Therefore unless stated otherwise, all translations are those of the modern editors/translators.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Huw Pryce, for his always helpful and stimulating advice. The sheer depth of his knowledge, both of primary and secondary material, never ceases to amaze me. Without a doubt his insights have aided the development of this project greatly. Similar thanks are due to Nancy Edwards, who posed questions of my thesis and provided stimulating analysis of Chapter 5, in particular. However, my gratitude towards Huw and Nancy goes beyond their professional advice. I am extremely grateful for the warm welcomed they extended to me in allowing me to stay at their home and treating me to delicious home-cooked meals. I must also thank Alex Woolf for reading draft chapters and allowing me access to an unpublished paper. Similar thanks are due to David Rollason. My experience at Durham where David was my Masters supervisor proved a challenging and demanding year which provided an excellent insight into the life of a postgraduate researcher. Thanks must also now be extended to my examiners, Fiona Edmonds and Mark Hagger, who have provided insightful criticism on how to improve future work extending from the thesis. This thesis further owes a debt of inspiration to Leslie Alcock and John Morris, whose respective works, *Arthur's Britain* and the *Age of Arthur*, demonstrated to a (much) younger Arthurian enthusiast that the study of 'Dark Age' Britain was both fascinating and possible. Thanks are also due to my fellow Bangor postgraduates, who were always ready to distract me with trips to the pub and other delights.

Last and by no means least, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my parents, Alison and Britain, without whose love and support none of this would be possible. This thesis is dedicated to them. Oh, yes, and, of course, the Pooch: who on earth could forget her!

<div align="center">Introduction</div>

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the creation of British ethnicity and regional Brittonic identities in the late Roman and earliest medieval centuries, that is, between 300 and 600 AD. However, in order to do so, it will be necessary to explore the evidence provided in Roman sources emanating from the earliest years of contact between Britain and the Empire. It is situated in the context of recent studies of late antique and early medieval identity and ethnicity, and explores the relationship between identity and concepts of power and authority.[1] The thesis is divided into two principal sections: the first deals with the creation of Britishness in the Roman and late antique periods; the second assesses the significance of regional identities in western and northern Britain between 300 and 600.

The first section of the thesis contains three chapters (Chaps: 2, 3, 4), dedicated to exploring the creation of a British *natio* or *gens*. Chapter 2 explores how Roman ethnography created an image of Britain as a wild island, far from the Mediterranean heartlands, populated by a barbaric and hostile population. It will at the same time discuss how Britain's incorporation into the empire affected the insular population under direct imperial control, arguing that the negative image of the Britons in imperial literature of various genres was problematic for the provincial population, initially at least, as they lacked a meaningful way to distinguish themselves from the unconquered Britons of the far north, who stood prominently in Roman ethnographic discourse. It thus argues further that the definition of Britain as an island province, the provincialization of the Britons, and the grant of citizenship in the early third century resulted in the gradual formation of the Britons as an imperial people.

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[1] See Ch. 1.

Chapter 3 builds on these arguments. Discussing how Britain as a province became enmeshed within wider imperial politics, particularly military usurpations and rebellions, it argues that ethnographic stereotypes associated with Britain were utilised to explain the island's reputation as the home of failed usurpers. However, the chapter also pursues the notion that the later Roman period witnessed the apogee of Britishness as an imperial identity, arguing that the emergence of the Pictish terminology resulted in the Britons being distinguished for the first time as an imperial people. However, it will also demonstrate that prejudices remained towards the Britons within continental Roman society, predicated, in part, by the persistence of ethnographic images of the Britons as a wild and barbarous people. Chapter 4, which focuses on the historical section of Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*, argues that the negative image of Britain and the Britons nonetheless passed into insular historiography and oral discourse, playing a decisive role in Gildas's presentation of his fellow countrymen as unwarlike and perfidious cowards. Discussing how Gildas perceived his *gens* as a timeless entity, existing since the creation of the island, the chapter will nevertheless argue that, for Gildas, Britishness, though an identity independent of the Roman empire, required the active embracement of the regional populations of western Britain for its continued vitality. Thus, it will be argued that Britishness was not static, but a social construct needing both participation and renewal for it to remain potent as a unit of adherence.

The second section also consists of three chapters (Chaps. 5, 6, 7). These examine the creation and perpetuation of regional identities amongst groups in western and northern Britain, discussing a range of issues across the period 300 to 600. Indeed, it will be argued that across our period western and northern groups within the Brittonic zone primarily adhered to regional and dynastic identities. Chapter 5 examines the epigraphic habit in Roman and late antique Britain; arguing that while the British *civitates* participated

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infrequently in this practice, it nevertheless reveals that regionalism was an important element of identity during the Roman period, expressed in terms of regional citizenship. It then goes on to discuss the post-Roman inscriptions of western and northern Britain, arguing that this practice was employed as a method by which emergent elites created and expressed their status within local contexts and in interregional politics. But it will further argue that this was indeed a period of ethnogenesis where immigrant groups merged with the local populace, testified to by the presence of culturally Irish 'British' dynasties in Wales and the south-west. This chapter supplements arguments made in Chapter 4, explaining that there was a transformation in the conception of citizenship during this period. Now, citizenship became Christianised and was no longer symbolic of membership of the secular Roman empire.

Chapter 6 then turns to the emergence of kingship and the expression of dynastic identities during the late antique and early medieval periods, focussing on the regions of western Britain which were once the Roman province of *Britannia Prima*. Here, the chapter argues that differing processes affected the eastern and western sections of the West British zone, dictated primarily on the type of interaction regional elites had with the imperial state. It will be argue, indeed, that interaction with the Roman world remained an important part of elite identity in this period, though the influence of the empire changed drastically from being an internal element of socio-political control to a distant power which supported allies on its peripheries. Fundamental to this chapter's premise, however, is the notion that the groups of the early middle ages, despite some continuity in names, were creations of the fifth and sixth centuries in which both imperial and ancestral elements were present. For instance, the use of 'Roman' titles and material culture such as pottery and the use and reuse of hillforts were complementary aspects in the articulation of power which expressed identity in a regional and interregional context. Chapter 7 covers the development of kingdoms in the northern frontier zone of Roman Britain – that is, the province of *Britannia Prima* and the intramural

zone between Tyne and Forth. It argues that developments between the Walls were affected profoundly by the presence of the Roman military stationed on the frontier; interaction between the Romans and intramural peoples in the later Roman period thus stimulating frontier *gentes* who evolved into the political groupings found in later textual sources such as the poetry of Taliesin and the *Gododdin* of Aneirin. It will further argue that the influence of the Roman empire persisted into the early middle ages as groups in the former province, Anglian and Brittonic, on the Wall and within the intramural zone vied to be considered the heirs of the Roman empire, utilising the landscape and material culture as expressions of power and identity.

Area of Study

As a wide range of historical and archaeological evidence is discussed in the forthcoming chapters, it is important here to define our area of study. The first three chapters are concerned with the island of Britain – *Britannia* – and her changing status as an imperial province, or series of provinces and finally a diocese. The discussion thus ranges from the southern coasts of Britain to the lands of northern Scotland, above the Forth. The 'sliding scale' of the discussion follows the parameters of the conquest, thus concerning itself, by and large, with the status of the lands which became an imperial possession. As we shall see, the Roman and early medieval sources provide justification for this approach. The latter three chapters of the thesis are concerned with areas within this broad expanse of territory, in late Roman terms the provinces of *Britannia Prima* and *Britannia Secunda* (plus the intramural zone) and their component regional groupings, the *civitates*. There is an area of Brittonic settlement, however, that has not entered into the discussion: Brittany.[2] Although this was an important area of interaction with Britain and the Britons in the late antique period which

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[2] See Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 56-74; C. Brett, 'Soldiers, Saints, and States? The Breton Migrations Revisited', *CMCS* 61 (Summer 2011), 1-56.

features in later Brittonic historical mythology, due to the restrictions of space it was deemed

necessary to omit discussion of Brittany and the formation of Brittonic identity in the

Armorican peninsula.[3]

The West British Zone

The province of *Britannia Prima* extended from Cornwall to the Dee, encompassing the

entirety of modern Wales, and much of what is now south-western and western-midland

England. In 400, it contained eight peoples: the *civitates* of the Dumnonii, Durotriges,

Dobunni, Silures, Demetae, Ordovices, Deceangli, and Cornovii.[4] By 700, the *civitates* had

been replaced by a series of *regiones*,[5] the most prominent being Dumnonia (Cornwall-

Devon), Gwynedd (north-west Wales), Venta (south-east Wales), Demetia (south-west

Wales) and Powys (north-east Wales and the Marches). Despite the collapse of the imperial

administration and state infrastructure, Latin and vernacular sources suggest contemporaries

continued to perceive western Britain as a distinct entity. Gildas, for example, appears to

address the kings of former (western) *Britannia Prima* – Constantinus, Aurelius Caninus,

Vortiporus, Cuneglasus, and Maglocunus – in his *De Excidio Britanniae*.[6] This political

geography is seemingly reflected in the Taliesin poem *Trawsganu Kynan Garwyn*, which

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[3] Any future elaboration of this project will include discussion of Brittany and the Bretons.

[4] White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 38-41.

[5] The term favoured by the ninth- and tenth-century sources: see Ch. 6.

[6] *DEB*, 28-36; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 89; D. N. Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating' in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *GNA*, pp. 51-60; A. Woolf, 'The Britons: From Romans to Barbarians' in H-W. Goetz, J. Jarnut & W. Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 345-80, at pp. 355-60.

praises the late sixth-century ruler Cynan Garwyn of the Cadelling, lauding his triumphs in Gwent, Môn, Dyfed, Brycheiniog and Cernyw.[7]

The Dobunni, *civitas Dobunnorum*, occupied Roman period Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, Herefordshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire.[8] Their capital was at *Corinium Dobunnorum*, Cirencester; a second major urbanised centre was the legionary *colonia* at Gloucester.[9] At least thirty-five villas were situated within sixteen kilometres of Cirencester, including Chedworth, Great Witcombe, Turkdean, and Woodchester.[10] To the southwest of the Dobunni, in the modern counties of Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, Hampshire and parts of eastern Devon, were *civitas Durotrigum*.[11] The Durotriges had their capital at *Durnovaria*, Dorchester.[12] Inscriptional evidence, however, reveals the existence of an administrative sub-division, *civitas Durotrages Lindiniensis*,[13] 'the Durotrigans of Lindiniae', centred on *Lindinis*, Ilchester.[14] Betwixt and between Dorchester and Ilchester were a number of 'exotic' villas, such as Hinton St Mary.[15] In the far southwest of the province were *civitas*

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[7] *Trawsganu Kynan Garwyn*, in I. Williams, *The Poems of Taliesin* Engl. edn. J. E. Caerwyn Williams (Cardiff, 1987), I, p. 1, 10-11, 12, 20, 16. For dispute over the reference to *kernyw*, see Marged Haycock, in Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 16, n. 77; G. R. Isaac, '*Trawsganu Kynan Garwyn mab Brochuael*: a Tenth-Century Political Poem', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologue* 51 (1999), 173-85, at 173-8. See Ch. 6.

[8] T. Moore, 'Perceiving Communities: Exchange, Landscapes and Social Networks in the Later Iron Age of Western Britain', *OJA* 26 (2007), 79-102, at 95-6; Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, p. 340.

[9] H. Hurst, 'Roman Cirencester and Gloucester Compared', *OJA* 24 (2005), 293-305; Jones and Mattingly, *Atlas*, pp. 50-1, Map, 3:7.

[10] K. Branigan, *The Roman Villa in South-West England* (Bradford-upon-Avon, 1976), pp. 21-2, 27; White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 125-31; N. Holbrook, 'Turkdean Roman Villa, Gloucestershire: Archaeological Investigations 1997-1998', *Britannia* 35 (2004), 39-76; G. Clarke, 'The Roman Villa at Woodchester', *Britannia* 13 (1982), 197-228.

[11] Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, p. 353.

[12] Wacher, *Towns*, pp. 323-35.

[13] *RIB*, 1672, 1673.

[14] *RIB*, 1672, 1673, 3376.

[15] B. Walters, 'Exotic Structures in 4th-century Britain', in P. Johnson (ed.), *Architecture in Roman Britain*, CBA Res. Rep. 94 (1996), pp.152-62.

Dumnoniorum, the Dumnonii of modern Devon and Cornwall.[16] This *civitas* probably

incorporated a sub-group known as the Cornovii.[17] Dumnonian territory was distinctly

lacking in Roman-style settlements, civilian or military. Although the former legionary

fortress of Isca served as the *civitas*-capital,[18] this was a landscape characterised by 'native'

forms of settlement such as the 'Cornish' courtyard houses with their distinctive subterranean

chambers known as *fogous* located, for instance, at Carn Euny and Chysauster.[19]

In modern southeast Wales were *civitas Silurum*, the Silures, administered from *Venta

Silurum*, Caerwent. According to Tacitus, the Silures were particularly ferocious in their

resistance to Rome, a recalcitrance which may be reflected in the construction of a legionary

fortress in their territory at *Isca*, Caerleon, home to *Legio II Augusta*.[20] Caerwent attracted to

its hinterland modest villas such as Castle Tump; however, others such as Whitton and

Llantwit Major were situated in the narrow yet fertile coastal strip between Barry and

Porthcawl.[21] Occupying what is now south-western Wales were *civitas Demetarum*, the

Demetae, with their capital at *Moridunum*, Carmarthen.[22] *Civitas Demetarum* possessed a

smattering of Roman-type settlements in proximity to Carmarthen; Trelissey, for instance,

developed into a modest cottage villa over the course of the Roman period.[23] Elsewhere in the

Dimetian *civitas* settlement was typified by sites such as Walesland Rath, an enclosed site

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[16] *RIB*, 1843, 1844.

[17] Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, pp. 342-3.

[18] Wacher, *Towns*, pp. 335-43.

[19] A. Fox, *South West England: 3,500 BC – AD 600* (Newton Abbot, 1973), pp. 177-8.

[20] V. Bellino, 'Romans, Silures and Ordovices: The Experience of Low-Intensity Warfare in Wales', *AC* 160 (2011), 13-38, at 23-8.

[21] M. G. Jarrett and S. Wrathmell, *Whitton. An Iron Age and Roman Farmstead in South Glamorgan* (Cardiff, 1981), pp. 55-74; A. H. A. Hogg, 'The Llantwit Major Villa: A Reconsideration of the Evidence', *Britannia* 5 (1974), 225-50.

[22] Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, p. 333; Wacher, *Towns*, pp. 391-4; H. James *et al*, *Roman Carmarthen: Excavations, 1978-1993*, Britannia Monograph Series no. 20 (London, 1993), pp. 14-15, 21-8.

[23] White, *Britannia Prima*, p. 143.

containing timber roundhouses and a rectangular building, occupied in the third and fourth centuries.[24] However, our understanding of Roman period settlement in far western Britain may need re-evaluation due to the recent discovery of Abermagwr villa, near Aberystwyth.[25] Located relatively far to the north of Carmarthen, Abermagwr's (apparent) isolation stands in contrast to the distribution of villas elsewhere in *Britannia Prima* which were usually sited in close proximity to urban centres.

Much of mid, northwest and northeast Wales has been assigned to the Ordovices.[26] Despite their lack of an urban centre and their resistance to Roman colonisation, Tacitus regarded the Ordovices as a *civitas* – a provincialized group.[27] The Ordovician heartlands were probably Arfon and Môn, with their administration taking place, in all likelihood, from the Roman fort at *Segontium*, Caernarfon, overlooking the Menai Straits.[28] In addition two sub-groups, the Decantae, whose name is preserved in Degannwy and the Gangani of the Lleyn Peninsula, may have been clients of the Ordovices.[29] In north-eastern Wales were the Deceangli, a people located in modern Flintshire, subdued by Ostorius Scapula in AD 48. Again, the Deceangli appear to be without an urban centre, though the *civitas* name appears

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[24] G. J. Wainwright, 'The Excavation of a fortified settlement at Walesland Rath', *Britannia* 2 (1971), 48-108.

[25] T. G. Driver and J. L. Davies, 'Abermagwr Romano-British villa, Ceredigion, mid Wales: Interim Report on its Discovery', *AC* 160 (2011), 39-50.

[26] M. G. Jarrett and J. C. Mann, 'The Tribes of Wales', *WHR* 4 (1968-9), 161-71, at 167-70; White, *Britannia Prima*, p. 136. Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, p. 434

[27] Tacitus, *Agricola*, 18.2: see Ch. 2.

[28] P. J. Casey and J. L. Davies with J. Evans, *Excavations at Segontium (Caernarfon) Roman Fort, 1975-1979*, CBA Research Report 98 (London, 1993); Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 20-1. A 'natural', topographic and geological division between Ordovician territory and that of its neighbours, at least to the south, would seem to be marked by the River Dyfi, where the stark, majestic landscape of northwest Wales gives way to the gentler, rolling hills characteristic of much of mid-Wales; this was, of course, the (sometime) medieval boundary of Gwynedd: M. E. Owen, 'Royal Propaganda: Stories from the Law-Texts', in T. M. Charles-Edwards, M. E. Owen and P. Russell (eds.), *The Welsh King and His Court* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 224-54, at pp. 232- 8, with text and translation, pp. 251-2.

[29] Jarrett and Mann, 'Tribes', 165; Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, p. 330.

on lead pigs recovered from Chester and Hints Common (Staffordshire) dated to the AD 70s.[30] Finally, in Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and perhaps parts of north-eastern Wales were the Cornovii, *civitas Cornoviorum*, whose capital was *Viroconium*, Wroxeter.[31]

Within the early medieval western British zone we find a multitude of kingdoms and polities. In the far southwest of former *Britannia Prima*, *civitas Dumnoniorum* transformed into Dumnonia.[32] Beyond Dumnonia west of the River Tamar existed 'bare Cornubia'; this may have been a separate or subservient political unit consumed within *civitas Dumnoniorum* and early medieval Dumnonia. We know little, however, of political geography within the former Dobunnic and Durotrigan *civitates*. Ergyng, a small kingdom in the Welsh Marches, appears to have originated within what was once Dobunnic territory. Further north, a kingdom known as Powys emerges in what was, at least in part, the *civitas* of the Cornovii. [33]

In what becomes southeast Wales the name 'Silures' disappears and a new name, *Venta* or Gwent came to signify this eastern zone; in central eastern Wales we have Brycheiniog, centred on Brecon. There are also other polities such as Gwerthyrnion, situated in the Marches. In southwest Wales, on the other hand, the name Demetae persisted into the early middle ages.[34] Dimetian territory probably extended to the River Teifi as cultural and political links existed with the region to the north, known as Ceredigion.[35] However, the northern Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd coveted the land between the Dyfi and the Teifi;

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[30] Jarrett and Mann, 'Tribes', 165-6; Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, p. 331.

[31] Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, pp. 324-5.

[32] Gildas, *DEB*, 28.1; Aldhelm, *Carmen Rhythmicum*, ed. R. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera Omnia*, MGH AA 15 (Berlin, 1919), p. 524;   D. Probert, 'New light on Aldhelm's letter to King Gerent of Dumnonia', in K. Barker and N. Brooks (eds.), *Aldhelm and Sherborne: Essays to Celebrate the Founding of the Bishopric* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 110-28, at p. 113.

[33] *Annales Cambriae*, ed. Dumville (A) 808, 822, 854.

[34] Gildas, *DEB*, 31.1. Cf. *Annales Cambriae* ed. Dumville, (A) 645, 797, 808.

[35] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, pp. 30-1.

indeed, Ceredigion takes its name from Ceredig, purportedly one of the sons of Cunedda, the progenitor of the Gwynedd dynasty whose seed, according to *Historia Brittonum* and the Harleian genealogies, ruled all northern and mid-Wales.[36]

The evidence for north and north-western Wales suggests an equally complex situation. As revealed by inscriptional evidence, Ordovician identity persisted into the fifth century; however, as the result of Irish political and cultural influence during this period northwest Wales became known as *Venedotia*, Gwynedd.[37] The heartlands of Gwynedd appear to have been Arfon and Môn; with the latter perhaps the most important locale within the Gwynedd kingdom. The remaining areas of north-western and north-eastern Wales were comprised of a multitude of smaller polities such as Meirionnydd, Dunoding, Dogfeiling, Osfeiling, Edeirnion, Eifionydd, Rhos and Rhufoniog. However, as these individuals were identified as the sons and grandson of Cunedda, the lands up to the Dee were subject to the Gwynedd hegemony.[38] The name of the people of north-eastern Wales, the Deceangli, is preserved in Tegeingl, the lands between the Clwyd and the Dee. Later, in the eleventh century Tegeingl had its own dynasty that competed with the Gwynedd kings for control over territory, peoples and resources.[39] This area also became subject to Gwynedd; and was perhaps so periodically throughout the early middle ages.

The North British Zone

The North British zone consisted of what was in the Roman period both *provincia* and *barbaricum*. In the Roman period, below the Wall, the local populace consisted of three

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[36] *HB*, 62; *HG*, 32. M. Miller, 'The Foundation-Legend of Gwynedd in the Latin Texts', *BBCS* 27 (1976-78), 515-32; R. G. Gruffydd, 'From Gododdin to Gwynedd: reflections on the story of Cunedda', *SC* 24/25 (1989-90), 1-14; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 180-1, 328-30.

[37] See Ch. 5.

[38] *HB*, 62; *HG*, 32.

[39] *Vita Griffini filii Conani*, ed. and trans. P. Russell (Cardiff, 2005), §26.

principal *civitates*. According to Tacitus, the most populous were the Brigantes; their territory covered all of Yorkshire, Lancashire and County Durham, with their 'capital' at *Isurium Brigantium*, Aldborough.[40] It was thought Brigantia extended beyond the frontier into Annandale in southern Scotland, though this extramural territory has now been assigned to the Anavionenses.[41] To the east of the Brigantes were the Parisi of Humberside and the Yorkshire Wolds, with their *civitas* 'capital' at *Peturia*, Brough-on-Humber. The eastern Brigantes and the Parisi were the *civitates* where Roman forms of architectural display and material cultures are most evident. Lastly, centred on *Luguvallum*, Carlisle, were the Carvetii of modern Cumbria and Lakeland.[42] This *civitas* show only limited acceptance of Roman material culture. Two further *civitates* are attested by inscriptional evidence: the Corionototae and Textoverdi, the latter situated in the Tyne valley, perhaps with their 'capital' at Corbridge.[43] Their longevity is unknown. Collectively, this area appears to have been known in the Roman period as Brigantia, as testified to by a number of inscriptions.[44]

Moving northwards, James Fraser has suggested that the region between the Tyne-Solway and Forth-Clyde might usefully be termed 'outer Brigantia' as these groups displayed cultural affinities with the Roman *Britannia* and the provincial peoples.[45] While acknowledging that aspects of *romanitas* were present in this zone both in the Roman and post-Roman periods, the preferred term for this region utilised throughout the thesis will be 'intramural' as this term recognises the importance of the Roman frontiers in the structuring

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[40] D. Breeze, 'Civil Government in the North: The Carvetii, Brigantes and Rome', *TCWAAS* 8 (2008), 63-72, at 64-7.

[41] A. R. Birley, 'The Anavonienses', in N. J. Higham (ed.), *Archaeology of the Roman Empire. A Tribute to the Life and Works of Professor Barri Jones* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 15-24.

[42] B. J. N. Edwards and D. C. A. Shotter, 'Two Roman Milestones from the Penrith area', *TWCAAS* 5 (2005), 65-78.

[43] *RIB*, 1142, 1695.

[44] *RIB*, 627, 628, 630, 1131, 2066, 2091.

[45] Fraser, *Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 22-3, 37.

of this zone. The names of the intramural peoples had appeared in the second-century *Geographia* of the Greek scholar, Ptolemy, who listed four groups as dwelling between Tyne and Forth: the Novantae, Selgovae, Damnonii and Votadini; a fifth group, the Anavionenses, is known from other sources.[46] The Novantae appear to have populated the northern shores of the Solway Firth, in Dumfries and Galloway: the Ptolemaic names *Novantarum Peninsula* and *Novantarum Promontorium* identified respectively as the Rhinns and Mull of Galloway.[47] The Anavionenses were the people of Lower Annandale and eastern Dumfriesshire, perhaps with an important 'centre' at Burnswark.[48] The Selgovae were located around the upper Tweed, with *Trimontium*, the 'three mountains' of the Eildon Hills situated above the Roman fort at Newstead, an important site in their territory.[49] The Damnonii populated Clydesdale as well as the northern shore of the Clyde, extending perhaps as far as the head of Loch Lomond and *Clach Mann Bretain*, 'the Stone of the Britons'.[50] The Votadini occupied the northeast coast of the intramural zone, with their heartlands above the Tweed, with the fortified hilltop enclosure of Traprain Law, Haddington, of particular importance.[51] It has been thought that Votadinian territory extended to the Tyne, where a southern Votadinian group were dominated by their proximity to the Roman frontier.[52] In fact, this southern group may have held provincial status, with *Coria*, 'hosting-place' –

[46] B. Jones and I. Keillar, 'Marinus, Ptolemy and the Turning of Roman Scotland', *Britannia* 27 (1996), 43-9; Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, p. 103; S. Frere, 'The Ravenna Cosmography and North Britain between the Walls', *Britannia* 32 (2001), 286-92; Birley, 'The Anavonienses', p. 17.

[47] Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, pp. 425-7.

[48] D. Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession. Britain in the Roman Empire* (London, 2006), pp. 423-6.

[49] A. Wilson, *Roman and Native in the Central Scottish Borders*, BAR Brit. Ser. 519 (Oxford, 2010), pp. 4-6; Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, p. 455.

[50] Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, pp. 345-6; Fraser, *Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 16-17.

[51] P. Hill, 'Traprain Law: the Votadini and the Romans', *Scottish Archaeological Review* 4 (1987), 85-91; M. Erdich *et al*, 'Traprain Law: native and Roman on the northern frontier', *PSAS* 130 (2000), 441-56.

[52] L. Macinnes, 'Settlement and Economy: East Lothian and the Tyne-Forth Province', in R. Miket and C. Burgess (eds.), *Between and Beyond the Walls: Essays on the Prehistory and History of North Britain in Honour of George Jobey*, pp. 176-198, at pp. 195-6; Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 241-2.

Corbridge, military hinterland site – proposed as their *civitas* 'centre'.[53] If, indeed, the Ptolemaic sites *Bremenium* (High Rochester) and *Alauna* (?Low Learchild) on Dere Street were in Votadinian territory, this group would have been under close military supervision.[54] However, it is likely that Corbridge was the *curia* of the Textoverdi. Votadinian territory, at least in the Roman period may have been limited to the lands above and around the Tweed.

The early medieval vernacular and Latin sources shed an uncertain light on 'dark age' north Britain.[55] As discussed further in chapter 7, a plethora of kingdoms emerged in northern Britain between Humber and Forth, some perhaps based on former *civitates*. Below the former Hadrianic *limes* were Rheged in the central Pennines, Elmet (Yorkshire West Riding), *regio Dunoding* and perhaps a host of smaller entities. Between the Walls were various other Brittonic kingdoms. In the east, around Edinburgh and Lothian were the Gododdin, heroes of the eponymous poem. On the Firth of Clyde was the kingdom of Alclud, with Aeron to their south in modern Ayrshire. Other political units also probably existed in this zone, though they are difficult to pin down with any precision.

The Sources

Throughout the thesis, reference is made to the *Annales Cambriae* and *Historia Brittonum*, found together in Harley 3859, a manuscript of *c.* 1100. These souces provide vital information for understanding the history of the Britons in the early middle ages. However, debate remains over the veracity of this information and the reliability of these texts,

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[53] Breeze, 'Civil government in the North', 68. Rivet and Smith identify *Coria* with Inveresk: Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, p. 320.

[54] Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, pp. 508-9.

[55] N. J. Higham, 'Britons in Northern England in the Early Middle Ages: Through a Thick Glass Darkly', *NH* 38 (2001), 5-25.

particularly in their early sections; therefore what follows will be a brief discussion outlyning the date and provenance of these texts, beginning with *Annales Cambriae*.

There are four principal versions of *Annales Cambriae*: **A** (London, British Library, MS Harley 3859, folios 190r-193r); **B** (London (Kew), Public Records Office, MS E.164/1 (K.R. Misc. Book Series I), pp. 2-26); **C** (London, British Library, MS Cotton Domitian A.i, folios 138r-155r); and **E** (Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3514, pp. 507-19 (*Cronica de Wallia*). For our purposes, citation of *Annales Cambriae* refers only to those entries which appear in the Harleian recension (**A**), which runs from 453 to 954. This last entry refers to the death of Rhodri son Hywel and is followed in the Harleian manuscript with genealogies which detail the agnatic and maternal descent of Owain son of Hywel.[56] This suggests that the annals were compiled prior to the death of Owain in 988 or, more likely, soon after 954. As for the compilation of the *Annales Cambriae* as a whole, the early strata of entries are deeply endebted to Irish annalistic writing, particularly up to the entry for the Battle of Chester in 613 (615); here there is a preponderence of ecclesiastical entries relating to the death of saints, such as Patrick, and notable religious figures. Gildas can be included in this group, thus his obit in 570 may have claims to be a contemporary or near contemporary notice.[57]

These ecclesiastical notices, and those of for Badon, Camlann and the death of Maelgwn Gwynedd, are then followed by the entries derived from what Kathleen Hughes posits as a Northern British chronicle; this is a collection of information supposedly compiled *c.* 800 which record the deaths of several prominent northern figures and important battles

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[56] K. Hughes, 'The Welsh Latin Chronicles: *Annales Cambriae* and Related Texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 59 (1973), 233-58, at 234.

[57] See Ch. 4.

between the Britons of Wales and the Northumbrians.[58] This is said to have influenced the composition of *Historia Brittonum*, the *Chronicle of Ireland* and, subsequently, the chronicles derived from this text, which include *Annales Cambriae*, the Clonmacnois Chronicle and the Annals of Ulster. However, Thomas Charles-Edwards has disputed Hughes' interpretation of the textual history of *Annales Cambriae* and the supposed existence of a Northern British chronicle, identifying the lack of verbal correspondence between this putative text and the Chronicle of Ireland, as well as the absence of British related events that appear in the Chronicle of Ireland but not in *Annales Cambriae* and *Historia Brittonum*.[59] A further important point raised by Charles-Edwards is the very real possibility that *Annales Cambriae* was subjected to 'radical abbreviation' in the tenth century, whereby an annalisic source of British provenance which covered the period 614-777 was subjected to drastic revision as it was incorporated into *Annales Cambriae*.[60] What seems more certain is that *Annales Cambriae*, or the text that became *Annales Cambriae*, became a contemporary account in the late eighth century when a scholar based at St Davids began to record the impact of Offa of the Mercians on Wales and in particular the people and kings of Dyfed. This compiler then provided the necessary backdrop by adding the northern material, derived from a probable British annalistic source and the Irish ecclesiastical material.[61] In overall terms, the reliability of *Annales Cambriae*, particularly in its earlier sections is still a matter of debate; however, it the when entries, such as the obit for Gildas, appear in Irish annals, then some credibility may be offered to these notices.

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[58] K. Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (London, 1972), pp. 122-3; Hughes, 'The Welsh Latin Chronicles', 237-41.

[59] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 350-2.

[60] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 357-9.

[61] Hughes, 'Welsh Latin Chronicles', 241-2.

Turning to *Historia Brittonum*, there are again multiple recensions that survive in manuscript form. The oldest and that which historians make most use of is that contained in Harley 3859, dated to *c.* 1100. This is the version consulted here and the one cited in the footnotes. It is thought to be the version which most faithfully preserves the work as it was originally composed in the ninth century. The basis for this date is reached by a number of conclusions, most notably the passage in chapter 16 which assigns its composition to the reign of the Gwynedd king Merfyn Frych – that is *c.* 829.[62] Another collection of manuscripts bear the name 'Nennius' and attribute authorship to Ninnius the disciple of St Elfoddw, probably the bishop of Gwynedd who died in 809. However, as this ascription is missing from the Harleian version, it is doubted whether this formed part of the original text as first composed. In fact, manuscripts containing the Nennian prologue most notably Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 139 include many embellishments not found in the Harleian text, including glosses which explain Welsh names in English.[63] Thus only material which appears in the Harley manuscript 3859 will be cited in the thesis, as this text appears to be nearest to the *Historia Brittonum* as originally composed.

Having outlined our area of study and the principal sources sited throughout the thesis, we can turn now to how scholars have approached issues of identity and power within Roman Britain and its various sub-regions.

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[62] D. N. Dumville, 'Some Aspects of the Chronology of the *Historia Brittonum*', *BBCS* 25 (1972-74), 439-45, at, 439.

[63] D. N. Dumville, 'The Corpus Christi "Nennius"', *BBCS* 25 (1972-4), 369-80.

Chapter 1: Issues and Approaches

Late and post-Roman Britain has been ill-favoured by recent scholarly paradigms dealing with issues of power and identity in the late antique period. Viewed as a cultural backwater, and allegedly peripheral to the dynamic power-politics of the late Roman empire,[1] Britain has been regarded as an island far from the socio-economic heartlands of the Mediterranean and, therefore, marginal to the processes which spawned the early medieval kingdoms of the West.[2] Indeed, so shrouded in mystery, barbarity and decline were the earliest medieval centuries in Britain that formerly only terms such as the 'Dark Ages' were deemed fit to describe this most enigmatic of periods.

Fortunately, scholarship has largely abandoned the negative connotations and restrictive interpretational framework implied by such value-laden descriptors as 'Dark Ages'. Nevertheless, Britain has been poorly served by the emerging scholarly approaches that have attempted to view the 'fall of the Roman empire', not in the stark and destructive terms envisaged by Edward Gibbon,[3] but as a period of cultural and political transformation in which emergent ideas, inspired largely by the Christian church, invigorated and sustained lingering notions of *romanitas* with new life. Peter Brown, for example, in his seminal study of the late Roman and early medieval world, cast Britain asunder from his conception of

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[1] Britain's apparent marginality is evident in recent accounts of the late Roman Empire, in which the diocese, and indeed the western provinces as a whole, feature only slightly; S. Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire* (Malden, 2007), pp. 47-100.

[2] H. Wolfram, 'The shaping of the early medieval kingdom', *Viator* 1 (1970), 1-20.

[3] E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. D Womersley 3 vols. (London, 1994); Gibbon stills maintains a huge influence over academic approaches to this period; see, for instance, B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford, 2005); C. Roberts, *Edward Gibbon and the Shape of History* (Oxford, 2014).

'Late Antiquity', claiming that 'the world of the northern barbarians remained peripheral' to the Mediterranean cultural centre.[4]

Britain's 'otherness' is seemingly nowhere more apparent when placed into the intellectual framework which views this period as fundamental to the 'transformation of the Roman world'. This entailed the 'integration of barbarians' into the power structures of the late Roman empire leading to a renegotiation of identities, termed by some 'ethnogenesis', resulting in the emergence on Roman territory of political units, kingdoms, led by *reges* bearing the ethnic names of peoples originating from beyond the Rhine-Danube frontier.[5] Late antiquity and the early middle ages are, as such, interpreted as a period whereby the political and cultural landscape of western Europe was irreconcilably altered due to the establishment of 'Germanic' barbarian kings and their 'ethnic' followers over the indigenous Roman populations of the western provinces.[6] Herwig Wolfram's pronouncement, however, that the only early medieval kingdoms worthy of investigation comprised of Germanic and Roman elements, spawning a 'distinctive type of Latin statehood', has resulted largely in the exclusion of Britain from the concept of the 'transformation of the Roman world' due to the 'complete break in political continuity' that had occurred in Roman Britain.[7] Indeed, so

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[4] P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity. From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London, 1971), p. 9.

[5] H. Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples*, trans. T. Dunlap (Berkeley, 1997); W. Pohl (ed.), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800* (Leiden, 1998); W. Pohl (ed.), *Kingdoms of the Empire: The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1997); H-W. Goetz, J. Jarnut & W. Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden, 2003).

[6] W. Pohl, 'The barbarian successor states' in L. Webster & M. Brown (eds.), *The Transformation of the Roman World AD 400-900* (London, 1997), pp. 33-47; W. Goffart, *Romans and Barbarians AD 418-584. Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, 1980).

[7] Wolfram, 'Shaping of the Early Medieval Kingdom', 1.

apparently different was Britain to other former provinces that only recently have the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms been admitted to the hallowed halls of European scholarly scrutiny.[8]

In the context of this present study, Wolfram crucially failed to mention the Brittonic kingdoms of *Britannia*. In contrast to the other kingdoms and peoples investigated during the course of the 'Transformation of the Roman World' project, western and northern Britain continued to be controlled following the cessation of imperial rule by an indigenous citizen population, the *Britanni*, who remained politically and culturally significant throughout late antiquity and the early middle ages.[9] While the Britons have been included in a recent 'Transformation of the Roman World' volume, it is pertinent to note that their cultural trajectory is perceived to be a negative one, resulting in a decline of *romanitas* and a 'descent in barbarism'.[10] It appears fundamental, indeed, to scholarly perceptions, particularly those of continental researchers adhering to the ethnogenesis model, that the Britons were marginal to the emergence of early medieval kingdoms in the West.

Brittonic marginality is explained by several issues central to theories surrounding the origins of 'Germanic' barbarian kingdoms in the former western Empire. First, the Britons were Roman citizens and, therefore, did not require 'integration' into the Roman world; second, the Britons, or rather the regional *civitas* populations, in contradistinction to the other the emergent peoples of the early medieval west, were not diverse peoples brought together in Roman territory and amalgamated into a single *gens* under the authority of an ethnic kingship; and third, the early departure of Britain from the empire meant that no 'distinctive Latin statehood' developed amongst the British kingdoms. As a result, the Britons, and the

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[8] B. Yorke, 'Anglo-Saxon *Gentes* and *Regna*', in Goetz, Jarnut & Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes*, pp. 381-407, at p. 382.

[9] Davies, *Wales*, pp. 85-120; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 192-244, 625-50; Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 51-69, 97-133; Dark, *Britain*, pp. 105-226.

[10] Woolf, 'The Britons', p. 380; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 220-44.

investigation of concepts of identity and ethnicity amongst them, have been considered largely beyond the purview of an academic initiative that predominately views the emergence of early medieval kingdoms as inextricably linked to barbarian 'Germanic' peoples and their relationship to the Roman world.[11]

This has had, of course, significant ramifications for the manner in which the Brittonic kingdoms have been viewed by scholarship, not only in their political development, which was, apparently, decidedly other, but also in their ethnic classification, particularly in the labelling of the early medieval Britons as 'Celts'.[12] It is appropriate to note that in scholarly discourse, the term 'Celtic' – which retains value when discussing the peoples of Gaul[13] – implies a differentiation from the other peoples of continental Europe, situating the Britons into a political, cultural and ethnic matrix alongside the other peoples of the British Isles, such as the Picts and Scots, who had never formed part of the Roman empire. A. P. Smyth, for example, can speak confidently of the Irish and Welsh during the medieval period having a 'consciousness of a shared Celtic heritage'.[14] Whilst the Britons and Irish shared some cultural features, such as literature, attributing to these peoples a collective heritage is entirely misleading, and would have occasioned surprise, if not outrage, in authors such as

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[11] But see now, D. N. Dumville, 'The Idea of Government in Sub-Roman Britain', in G. Ausenda (ed.), *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 177-216. C. McKenna, 'Inventing Wales', in W. Pohl, C. Gantner, and R. Payne (eds.), *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: the West, Byzantium and the Islamic world, 300-1100* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 137-54. This study deals largely with post-900 concepts of Welsh identity.

[12] See below for further discussion.

[13] R. MacMullen, 'The Celtic Renaissance', *Historia* 14 (1965), 93-104; R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 16-20, 25-56.

[14] A. P. Smyth, 'The Emergence of English Identity, 700-1000', in *idem* (ed.), *Medieval Europeans: Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 24-52 at p. 31.

Gildas. As the label 'Celtic' is not applied to the Britons in classical or medieval sources, it will not be used as a pseudonym for them in this study.[15]

Names, Peoples and Places

One of the principal problems affecting any study which attempts to draw comparison between the Brittonic regions/kingdoms is that over the course of the centuries, these areas of western and northern Britain, stretching from Cornwall to the Clyde, were incorporated into independent socio-political and geographical entities, namely Wales, England and Scotland. In recent times, these nations have developed their own historiographical traditions which sought to push contemporary political and cultural entities back into the past, largely in an attempt to speak to the concerns of contemporary audiences. The historiographical isolation of the Brittonic areas is of course most apparent in studies concerned with the principal area of Brittonic survival in medieval and modern Britain, Wales.

In modern academic Welsh historiography, this approach was first utilised by J. E. Lloyd in his *A History of Wales: From the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, first published in 1911.[16] As Huw Pryce has shown, Lloyd was concerned with writing a nation's past, placing Wales on par with England both in terms the history of its people but also in academic circles.[17] However, Lloyd sometimes viewed Wales in a kind of cultural and

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[15] The 'Celticity' debate has been fought most vehemently in archaeological discourse. For the 'Celtosceptic' view, see J. Collis, *The Celts: Origins, Myths, Inventions* (Stroud 2003); S. James, *The Atlantic Celts. Ancient People or Modern Invention* (London 1999). For the 'Celtomaniac' appraoch, see R. Megaw & V. Megaw, 'Ancient Celts and Modern Ethnicity' in G. Carr & S. Stoddart (eds.), *Celts from Antiquity* (Cambridge 2002), pp. 19-26; R. Karl, 'Celtoscepticism- a convenient excuse for ignoring non-archaeological evidence?', in E. W. Sauer (ed.), *Archaeology & Ancient History: Breaking Down the Boundary* (London 2004), pp. 185-99: see further the arguments of Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Celtomania & Celtoscepticism', *CMCS* 36 (Winter 1998), 1-36.

[16] J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales From the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, 2 vols. (London, 1911).

[17] H. Pryce, *J. E. Lloyd and the Creation of Welsh History: Renewing a Nation's Past* (Cardiff, 2011), Ch. 7.

political isolation – indeed the title of Lloyd's seventh chapter, 'The Age of Isolation', highlights this tendency.[18] Indeed, for Lloyd it was of small concern to identify or engage with wider concepts of 'Britishness' which may have existed between Brittonic areas in the medieval period. Although Wendy Davies' thematic approach differed markedly from Lloyd's own concerns with narrative, she adopted similar geographical parameters to Lloyd's in her seminal *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*.[19] Offa's Dyke provides some justification in utilising the geographical extent of Wales as a zone of study, at least from the eighth century onwards. What is more problematic is attempts by scholars such as Lloyd to push Wales as a unit of study back into the Roman period, or even the depths of prehistory.[20] Needless to say, there was no such entity as Wales in this earlier period, and therefore defining the boundaries of study in these terms hinder, for example, the detection of wider patterns in the archaeological record.

The partitioning of Brittonic areas into their perceived historical/geographical areas is also evident in the study of the northern Britons. K. H. Jackson, for example, elaborated in his reasons for entitling his edition of the heroic poem *Y Gododdin* as *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem*:

> Lastly, what is meant by calling the *Gododdin* 'the Oldest Scottish poem'? Is it not
> a Welsh poem? Certainly it exists in a manuscript written in Wales, in the Welsh
> language, in a Welsh library. At the same time, scholars are nowadays for the most
> part agreed that it or its nucleus must have been composed in Scotland, very likely
> Edinburgh… It is clear, further, that the heroes commemorated were almost all

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[18] Lloyd, *History of Wales* I, pp. 194-228.

[19] Davies, *Wales*, pp. 5-31.

[20] V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Roman Frontier in Wales* 2nd edn, M. G. Jarrett (Cardiff, 1969), pp. 1-8; Arnold and Davies, *REMW*; Jarrett and Mann, 'Tribes of Wales', 161-71; P. Guest, 'The Early Monetary History of Wales: Identity, Conquest and Acculturation on the Imperial Fringe', *Britannia* 39 (2008), 33-58; B. C. Burnham and J. L. Davies (eds.), *Roman Frontiers in Wales and the Marches* (Aberystwyth, 2010).

from Scotland, and there is reason to think that Aneirin traditionally the author, was so too.[21]

While this definition was perhaps the result of arbitrary decision-making, it is quite likely that Jackson, himself an Edinburgh scholar, intended this as a sop towards his colleagues in *Din Eidyn*. This seemingly benign description of the origins of the poem, poet and the participants mentioned in it, aptly demonstrates the problems facing those attempting to study Brittonic history in its widest sense. Jackson further describes the lands ruled by Urien of Rheged, a probable historical figure of the late sixth century praised in the poetry of Taliesin, as lying 'partly in Scotland and partly in England, its capital was at Carlisle in England whereas that of the Gododdin was Edinburgh in Scotland'.[22] The use of Scotland and England as descriptions of sixth- and seventh-century political entities is, of course, anachronistic.[23] Edinburgh in fact, lay not within Scotland, but in the territory of the Gododdin, a Brittonic people; indeed, rather than clarifying the political geography of early medieval north Britain, the anachronism inherent in such labels merely causes confusion in creating the illusion that Urien's territory straddled two different political and ethnic boundaries. This can be seen in the history of Alclud, a Brittonic kingdom which maintained its identity and a degree of political autonomy into the eleventh century.[24] By this time, the kingdom had become Strathclyde, known also as Cumbria to reflect its expansion beyond the Solway into the Lake

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[21] *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem*, ed. K. H. Jackson (Edinburgh, 1969), p. ix.

[22] *The Gododdin*, ed. Jackson, p. ix.

[23] Certainly outside Dal Riata.

[24] A. MacQuarrie, 'The Kings of Strathclyde, c. 400 – c. 1018', in A. Grant and K. J. Stringer (eds.), *Medieval Scotland: Crown, Lordship and Community, Essays Presented to G.W.S. Barrow* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 1-19

District.[25] In modern historiography, this has resulted in the problematic definition of a 'Scottish Cumbria' and an 'English Cumbria'.[26]

We are faced, therefore, with the thorny problem of using later medieval and modern political and geographical terminology to discuss situations which prevailed in an earlier period. To a certain extent, this approach is evident in Thomas Charles-Edwards' magisterial *Wales and the Britons* where regional British communities are introduced on the basis of modern political boundaries.[27] Nonetheless, Charles-Edwards draws important parallels between Brittonic communities within Britain and even those of Gaul, a matter which, strangely enough, was criticised by Woolf.[28] In order to circumvent these issues, Roger White focused his study on *Britannia Prima*, the late Roman province which perhaps covered the entirety of modern Wales, southwest England and the midland border counties.[29] In doing so, White was able to draw comparisons between intimately connected regions ignored by studies restrained by their focus on the modern national boundaries. In a sense, it is impossible to ignore anachronistic terms as England, Scotland, and Wales; however, for the purpose of this study this terminology, when deployed, is done so in a clear and uniform manner in order, principally, to situate ancient and medieval sites in their modern location.

Romanization

Understanding culture and identity in late and post-Roman Britain must, to some extent, rely on how we envisage Britain in the earlier Roman period. In many respects, the study of

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[25] F. Edmonds, 'The Emergence and Transformation of Medieval Cumbria', *SHR* 93 (2014), 195–216, at 200-8; P. A. Wilson, 'On the use of the terms "Strathclyde'' and "Cumbria''', *TCWAAS* 66 (1966) 57–92.

[26] Edmonds, 'Transformation of Medieval Cumbria', 196, n. 4.

[27] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 14-21, 21-3.

[28] A. Woolf, 'Review Article: *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064* by T. M. Charles-Edwards', *EHR* 129 (2014), 160-2, at 161.

[29] White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 36-42.

Roman Britain has always centred on identity. This approach originated with Francis Haverfield's seminal work, *The Romanization of Britain*.[30] On the relative presence or absence of certain diagnostic features of the archaeological record introduced with the Roman conquest such as villas, towns, imported pottery and coinage, as well as linguistic change characterised by the adoption of Latin, Haverfield divided Britain by a line running from the Humber to the Severn into a romanised zone to the south and east an un-romanised zone to the north and west.[31] This model was restated by Cyril Fox, who saw a distinction between the western and northern 'military' or 'highland zone' and the eastern and southern 'civilian' or 'lowland zone'.[32]

This, perhaps, remains one of the most enduring parts of Haverfield's ground-breaking analysis, surviving today with only slight modification.[33] For instance, Ken Dark sub-divided his 'western Britain' into two zones on the relative absence or presence of Roman material culture: the first, 'romanised zone' covering western England from the Mersey to the south coast and from south-east Wales to the rivers Parret in Somerset; the second, 'un-romanised zone' inclusive of southwest England south of River Avon in Devon, and the remaining areas of Wales.[34] To underline this distinction, some scholars have reinforced the highland/lowland division in ethnic and cultural terms. For instance, Roger White regards the provincials of *Britannia Prima* to be distinguished into two groups, with

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[30] F. Haverfield, *The Romanization of Britain*, (4th edn., Oxford, 1923). See R. Hingley, *The Recovery of Roman Britain, 1586-1906. A Colony So Fertile* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 313-25.

[31] Haverfield, *Romanization*, pp. 24-7, Fig. 1.

[32] C. Fox, *The Personality of Britain* (Cardiff, 1959), pp. 28-44, at pp. 36-8.

[33] A. Sargent, 'The North-South Divide Revisited: Thoughts on the Character of Roman Britain', *Britannia* 33 (2002), 219-26; R. Reece, 'Models in Collision; East and West in Roman Britain', *OJA* 14 (1995), 113-15.

[34] Dark, *Britain*, pp. 105-49, 150-92.

'Britons' confined to the highland, military districts and 'Romans' dwelling in the lowland, civilian zone.[35]

For Haverfield, the British peoples' adoption of Roman culture and lifestyles 'extinguished the distinction between Roman and provincial'; however, he also recognised that the loss of this distinction 'did not everywhere and at once destroy all traces of tribal or national sentiments or fashions'.[36] Haverfield nonetheless regarded Roman culture as inherently superior to that of the indigenous Britons, who were civilized steadily over the course of the Roman occupation. This, however, only affected the upper portions of society, with the lower strata remaining resolutely 'natives'.[37] Haverfield's model has had an enormous impact on the study of Roman Britain – and indeed the Roman empire. R. G. Collingwood was one of the first British scholars to react to Haverfield's romanization paradigm.[38] Collingwood, in contrast, adopted fusion as a method of explaining the culture of Roman Britain, using the terms 'Romano-British' or 'Romano-Celtic'. Nevertheless, like Haverfield, Collingwood continued to view this process as affecting only the uppermost layers of society, with the lower classes remaining Celtic peasants.[39]

The clear differences in the archaeological record between settlements and material cultures in the highland and lowland zones can also be extended into the linguistic sphere. As the Empire took hold of southern and central Britain, Latin of course became the dominant language in socio-political discourse, replacing the British Celtic spoken by local peoples. It has been thought that this linguistic change was confined to the upper echelons of society, in particular the owners of great estates and town dwellers who would have interacted with the

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[35] White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 149-151.

[36] Haverfield, *Romanization*, p. 18.

[37] Haverfield, *Romanization*, p. 59.

[38] R. G. Collingwood, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1932)

[39] Collingwood, *Roman Britain*, pp. 92-3.

Roman state hierarchy on a regular basis. In contrast, the rural masses were seen to have retained British Celtic, just as with the majority of the population of the highland zone. However, a recent study by Peter Schrijver argues that by the late Roman period Latin was the dominant language amongst the entire population – rural and urban, high and low status – of the lowland zone. As a result of the high prestige of Latin as the language of Empire, Lowland British Celtic was Latinised thus differentiating it from Highland British Celtic; with, eventually, Latin becoming the dominant tongue throughout the lowland areas by 400 AD.[40] Schrijver reached this conclusion on the basis of theories derived from contact linguistics, the presence of numerous Latin loan words in British Celtic and the phonetic and morphosyntactic changes evident in Highland British Celtic, which took place in the fifth century, after the ending of Roman Britain.[41] The process whereby British Celtic ceased to adopt Latin words is regarded to have occurred in the fifth century, when due to the collapse of imperial power Latin lost its prestige in Britain; nonetheless, Schrijver views this period as decisive due to the importation of a Latin 'accent' into Highland British Celtic which, according to his hypothesis, was the result of Latin-speaking Britons arriving in the highland zone in the face of the Saxon onslaught.[42] Thus the highland and lowland populations are seen as different, with the lowland population similar, linguistically, to the inhabitants of northern Gaul with both these groups speaking a variation of provincial Latin marked by dipthongisation (represented by the change, for instance, from $*\text{-}\bar{u} > \text{-}ou$) which differentiates these languages from Highland British Celtic. Schrijver's theory of Latin dominance in the lowland zone has not, however, met with universal agreement. David Parsons in his examination of place-names in Roman Britain has argued that British Celtic remained widely

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[40] P. Schrijver, 'What Britons spoke around 400', in N. Higham (ed.), *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 165-171.

[41] Schrijver 'What Britons spoke around 400', pp. 166-7.

[42] Schrijver 'What Britons spoke around 400', pp. 167-8.

spoken, perhaps particularly amongst members of lower social strata throughout the diocese at the end of the Roman period, including the south and east.[43] However, Parson's does note the possibility of regional variation, with the south and east showing more signs of Latin but the west midlands and the southwest areas of continuity in terms of British Celtic.[44] What would seem certain is that over the course of the earliest medieval centuries, after the end of Roman Britain, British Celtic, *Cymraeg*, became an ethnic marker in the highland zone binding the Brittonic peoples and kingships from Cornwall to the Clyde as a single *gens*.[45]

While, then, the linguistic status of the lowland population as a whole remains uncertain, some scholars are still prone to accentuate cultural differences between the romanised elite and the 'Celtic' peasantry. Neil Faulkner, for instance, suggests that the culture and religion of the villa-dwellers and the rural peasantry were widely divergent in terms of personal ornamentation and appearance, belief-systems and general way of life: the former 'Roman', the latter 'Celtic' or 'British'.[46] Malcolm Todd has, indeed, declared that 'There seems to have been little that was British, or even more generally Celtic, in the intellectual and spiritual life of the ruling oligarchy'.[47] According to Ken Dark, the late Romano-British villa elite were pagans while the rural peasantry practised a militant form of Christianity.[48] As such, divergence was accentuated in the later fourth century between rich and poor in religion, cultural horizons, and lifestyles due to the emergence of great estates

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[43] D. Parsons, 'Sabrina in the Thorns: Place Names as Evidence for British and Latin in Roman Britain', *Transactions of the Philological Society* 109 (2011), 113-37.

[44] Parsons, 'Sabrina in the Thorns', 134-5.

[45] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 75-89; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society among the Insular Celts', in M. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London, 1995), pp. 703-36.

[46] N. Faulkner, *Decline and Fall of Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 208-20, at p. 219-20.

[47] M. Todd, *Roman Britain, 55 BC-AD 400. The Province Beyond the Ocean* (London, 1985), p. 224.

[48] K. R. Dark, 'The Late Antique Landscape of Britain, AD 300-700', in N. Christie (ed.), *Landscapes of Changes: Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 279-99, at pp. 285-90.

centred on palatial villas such as Bignor, North Leigh, Woodchester, Chedworth and Great Witcombe; the increased economic exploitation of the peasant masses by the landholding elite resulting eventually in a social revolution and the downfall of the villa class.[49] Indeed, W. H. C. Frend suggested that the 'Barbarian Conspiracy' of AD 367 affected a rebellion amongst the suppressed masses from which the villa elite never truly recovered.[50]

Economic exploitation of the rural classes does indeed form a fundamental element in wider arguments concerned with the decline of state power in Britain, manifest in the failure of the revenue cycle and the resultant decline in villas and towns in the late Roman period.[51] We are of course frustrated in our analysis of the British situation due to the lack of textual sources concerned to document events within Britain; however, Graham Webster in his 1969 review of the ending of Romano-British villa society cautioned against placing too much, or indeed any, emphasis on the historical record, particularly on events such as the 'Barbarian Conspiracy', when interpreting the decline of villa society: in buildings where combustible materials and open hearths were common, the risk of fire from carelessness or misfortune must have been great; hence destruction by fire was, more often than not, accidental.[52]

On a wider scale, social unrest has been viewed as a major contributing factor to the 'decline and fall' of the western Roman empire, with armed mobs known as *bacaudae*

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[49] Dark, 'Landscape of Britain', pp. 285-90. For discussion of agricultural communities in the late Roman world, including the relationship between landlord and peasant, see C. Grey, *Constructing Communities in the Late Roman Countryside* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 121-37.

[50] W. H. C. Frend, 'Pagans, Christians, and 'the Barbarian Conspiracy' of A. D. 367 in Roman Britain', *Britannia* 23 (1992), 121-131, at 121, 128; S. Scott, *Art and Society in Fourth-Century Britain. Villa Mosaics in Context*, (Oxford, 2000), pp. 165-6.

[51] Taxation cycle: Esmonde Cleary, *ERB*, pp. 72-4, 138-61; Martin Millet, *The Romanization of Britain* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 124-6; C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middles Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 309-10. Exploitative villa elite: Faulkner, *Decline and Fall*, pp. 198-200.

[52] G. Webster, 'The Future of Villa Studies', in A. L. F. Rivet (ed.), *The Roman Villa in Britain* (London, 1969), pp. 217-49, at pp. 221-37.

terrorising the elite and destabilised the provincial structure of Gaul and elsewhere.[53] E. A. Thompson argues that it was the disaffected peasantry, the Celtic masses, who overthrow the Roman government of Britain in 409 and this model was replicated by similar communities in Gaul.[54] Yet recent reassessment of the Gallic *bacaudae* would see the traditional interpretation of 'oppression' and 'exploitation' in the social relationship between landowners and peasantry as wholly unsatisfactory.[55] Rather, Raymond Van Dam has argued that the emergence of *bacaudae* was the result of local people searching for alternative modes of leadership in troubled times; the hostility of the *bacaudae* was not therefore directed at the landowning elites in a desire to overturn oppression but to find viable alternative forms of local leadership, often due to the absence of an imperial presence, which offered protection and assistance through reinforced ties of social dependence.[56]

Whatever the contrasts between elites and peasantry in the Roman period, the romanization paradigm has undergone serious scrutiny in recent decades. Martin Millet has criticised the Britons' passive role in Haverfield's model, where they had been the grateful recipients of Roman civilisation. Instead, Millet located agency in the hands of the native elites who emulated Roman architectural forms and lifestyles in order to reinforce their traditional roles as society's leaders in the new world order.[57] Millet further argued that emulation was an on-going process, responsible for the gradual filtration of Roman culture to

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[53] E. A. Thompson, 'Peasant Revolts in Late Roman Spain and Gaul', *P&P* 2 (1952), 11-23, at 16-20; *idem*, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison, 1982), pp. 31, 34, 36, 53-6, 183-7; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (London, 1981), pp. 458-9, 474-84. On the spelling of *bacaudae*, see C. E. Minor, 'Bagaudae' or 'Bacaudae'?, *Traditio* 31 (1975), 318-322; *idem*, 'Bacaudae: A Reconsideration', *Traditio* 51 (1996), 297-307.

[54] E. A. Thompson, 'Zosimus 6. 10. 2 and the Letters of Honorius', *CQ* (1982), 445-62, at 55-9.

[55] J. F. Drinkwater, 'The Bacaudae of fifth-century Gaul' in J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 208-17.

[56] Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, pp. 16-20, 25-56.

[57] Millet, *The Romanization of Britain*, pp. 37-8.

the lower levels of Romano-British society, which by the fourth century was apparent in the proliferation of villa-type dwellings. Millet, indeed, stressed that romanization was a 'two-way process of acculturation' in which a range of external influences and material cultures, not all derived from Rome, were adapted and reshaped by indigenous peoples to form a new provincial culture.[58] Again, however, Millet focused on the elite or at least those groups most visible in the architectural record due to the persistence of 'Roman' building materials.

This process has been described by Gregg Woolf as the journey towards 'becoming Roman'.[59] Social and cultural responses amongst the peoples subjugated by Rome in Woolf's model differed due to their experience of colonisation and imperialism, exposure to the Roman military and subsequent access to imperial patronage and the avenues of power and opportunity created by incorporation into the empire.[60] In Britain, the comparatively brief Roman occupation of the south and east is often regarded as having a significant, positive affect both on the indigenous peoples' ability to 'Romanise' and the development of a civilian infrastructure characterised by roads, urbanity and peacefulness.

Additional factors have also been considered by scholars, especially the degree to which indigenous societies were centralised and receptive to Roman culture prior to their incorporation into the empire. In Britain, centralisation is evident amongst southern groups such as the Catevellauni and Trinovantes, a tendency apparent in the construction of *oppida* which prefigure the development of Roman period urban settlements at St Albans and Colchester respectively.[61] British peoples of central southern and eastern Britain were,

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[58] Millet, *Romanization*, pp. 1-2; S. Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London, 1997), pp. 33-6.

[59] G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman: the Origins of Provincial Civilisations in Gaul* (Cambridge, 1998).

[60] Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, pp. 1-23.

[61] G. Woolf, 'Rethinking the Oppida', *OJA* 12 (1993), 223-34; M. Pitts, 'Rethinking the Southern British Oppida: Networks, Kingdoms and Material Culture', *European Journal of Archaeology* 13 (2010), 32-63.

moreover, acquainted with the empire and its symbolism prior to the conquest, having previously experienced diplomatic and cultural contact with Rome.[62] Indeed, kingship was an all-important mediating instrument in the dealings between Rome and the barbarians in Britain as elsewhere.[63]

In recent decades, however, the romanization paradigm, whether or not it integrates models of acculturation and emulation, has come under increasing pressure from scholars who would jettison this explanation entirely. Janet Webster, for instance, has rejected romanization as a 'simplistic and outdated model of provincial cultural change', whose focus on elite adoption of (supposedly) superior traits ignores the apparent rejection of Roman culture by non-elites.[64] Rather, for Britain and Gaul Webster has proposed that the non-elite population's reception of Roman material culture might be seen in terms of creolization, 'a process of *resistant* adaptation' where items were used 'according to a different, indigenous, set of underlying rules' which did not signify wholesale adoption of Roman identities or recognition of imperial rule.[65] This model situates power and its use at the heart of its explanation, seeking to elucidate circumstances in early Roman Britain in terms of the unequal dynamics of power which must have existed between colonised and coloniser. Creolization might be useful in explaining developments in the 'highland zone' – that is, Wales, and southwest and northwest England – where 'native' forms of unenclosed and

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[62] D. Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire* (Princeton, 2011), pp. 80-5; J. Creighton, *Coins and Power in Late Iron Age Britain* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 80-5, 101-25; Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, pp. 29-39; M. Henig, *The Heirs of King Verica: Culture and Politics in Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2002), pp. 32-3.

[63] D. Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King* (London, 1984), pp. 75-85.

[64] J. Webster, 'Creolizing the Roman Provinces', *American Journal of Archaeology* 105 (2001), 209-25, at 215.

[65] Webster, 'Creolizing', 218 (emphasis in original).

enclosed homesteads persisted to the virtual exclusion of Roman cultural material, including pottery, coinage and building forms.[66]

A 'nativist's model of cultural development has, in fact, sought to explain the articulation of power and identity amongst communities who chose not to participate in Roman forms of cultural display.[67] Elite status in Roman Britain could be constructed with or without reference to *romanitas* regardless of whether the particular *civitas* was highly 'romanised' or otherwise.[68] For example, hillforts appear to have been particularly important in highland *Britannia Prima*.[69] An extreme interpretation of this hillfort occupation views the upland communities of Wales (and the Pennines) maintaining a deeply-entrenched hostility towards the Roman state.[70] However, there seems little reason to view these settlements as symptomatic of local animosity; indeed, the density of late Roman military dispositions in *Britannia Prima*, the abandonment of numerous forts since third century,[71] and the location of the remaining occupied forts suggest that the Roman military in western Britain was directed primarily at repelling overseas raiders rather than holding down 'native' insurgents.[72] It could nonetheless be possible to view such occupancy as resistant adaptation, with the

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[66] Arnold and Davies, *REMW*, pp. 15-26, 45-51; Guest, 'Roman Wales', 56; R. Hingley, 'Rural settlement in Northern Britain', in Todd (ed.), *Companion to Roman Britain*, pp. 327-48, at pp. 338-44; R. Hingley, *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain* (London, 1989), pp. 133-48; White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 123-47; S. M. Pearce, *The Archaeology of South West Britain* (London, 1981), pp. 151-4; Fox, *South West England*, pp. 175-82.

[67] Hingley, *Rural Settlement*, pp. 147-8, 158-61.

[68] J. Taylor, 'Encountering Romanitas: Characterising the Role of Agricultural Communities in Roman Britain', *Britannia* 44 (2012), 171-90, at 177-85.

[69] Hingley, *Rural Settlement*, pp. 147-8; White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 78-80, 140-1, 145, 147; Arnold and Davies, *REMW*, pp. 87-9.

[70] G. Simpson, *Britons and the Roman Army. A Study of Wales and the Southern Pennines in the 1st-3rd Centuries* (London, 1964), pp. 144-56.

[71] R. G. Livens, 'The Roman Army in Wales, A.D. 120-220', *WHR* 7 (1974), 88-95.

[72] Arnold and Davies, *REMW*, pp. 13-34; White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 59-72.

hillfort dwellers' peaceful inhabitation of these sites a statement of their non-Roman identity.[73]

In fact, some scholars, notably Richard Reece, view the Britons' adoption of Roman traits as nothing more than a Mediterranean veneer which over the centuries peeled away to reveal an almost unblemished 'Celtic society'.[74] Indeed, J. T. Smith has suggested that many Romano-British villas, and indeed examples from continental Europe, show evidence of dual-occupation on the 'Celtic' system of landholding and ownership of property.[75] It is thus suggested that much of what was Roman about villa life was a mere façade, behind which lurked a deeply-embedded Celticity amongst the Romano-British elite. However, this interpretation has found little favour.[76]

David Mattingly has proposed a new methodology to understand identities in Roman Britain – 'discrepant identities'.[77] Rather than just examining the upper echelons of society, either those of incoming 'Romans' or the indigenous elites who adopted Roman fashions, Mattingly stresses the variability in the experience of persons within Roman Britain and how individual and group identities were formulated within and against the power structures of the imperial state.[78] Communities were thus formed – rural society, the military, urban dwellers

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[73] See Ch. 6.

[74] R. Reece, 'Town and Country: The End of Roman Britain', *WA* 12 (1980), 77-91; Faulkner, *Decline and Fall*, pp. 208-20. M. E. Jones, 'The Failure of Romanization in Celtic Britain', *Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 7 (1987), 126-45.

[75] J. T. Smith, 'Villas as a key to social structure', in M. Todd (ed.), *Studies in the Romano-British Villa* (Leicester, 1978), pp. 149-85, at pp. 149-70; *idem*, 'Barnsley Park Villa; Its Interpretation and Implications', *OJA* 4 (1985), 341-51.

[76] G. Webster and L. Smith, 'Reply to J.T. Smith's Suggested Re-Interpretation of Barnsley Park Villa', *OJA* 6 (1987), 69-89; S. Clarke, 'The Social Significance of Villa Architecture in Celtic North West Europe', *OJA* 9 (1990), 337-53.

[77] D. Mattingly, 'Being Roman: Expressing Identity in a Provincial Setting', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 17 (2004), 5-25.

[78] Mattingly, 'Being Roman', 13-19.

and so forth – who interacted in lesser or greater degrees with the imperial authorities. Each group evinced distinctive characteristics in their use of material culture, building practices and ritual behaviour. This paradigm might aid our understanding of culture in late and post-Roman northern and western Britain. At one time resistance to imperial rule and culture was one 'discrepant experience' perhaps common to these regions. This model, however, allows us to view these communities as organic entities capable of changing and developing across a broad chronological period their understanding of and interactions with imperial power and culture. Individuals and groups could thus adopt and adapt elements of *romanitas* to suit their discrepant needs in a time of political and social flux in which Roman state power retreated from Britain.

The relative strengths of Roman and British identities amongst the peoples of Roman and late antique Britain is an area which warrants further investigation, particularly in the changing perceptions of the Roman past by authors such as Patrick and Gildas.[79] Nick Higham, exploring the juxtaposition of Roman and British identities, argues that as a consequence of the Britons' colonial experience, Britishness was asserted against *romanitas* which was reduced to 'other-ness'.[80] Indeed, 'the ending of Roman Britain' must be accorded a role in the renegotiation of identities which took place in this period.[81] Guy Halsall, for instance, has suggested that the removal of the imperial court from northern Gaul may have caused a crisis of identity amongst those landowners who participated closely in the imperial

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[79] See Ch. 4.

[80] N. Higham, 'Historical Narrative as Cultural Politics: Rome, "British-ness" and "English-ness"', in *idem* (ed.), *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 68-79, at pp. 72, 76-8.

[81] Esmonde Cleary, *ERB*, pp. 131-61; M. J. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain* (Ithaca, 1998), pp. 186-243; N. J. Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1992), pp. 69-77; I. N. Wood, 'The end of Roman Britain: Continental evidence and parallels', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *GNA*, pp. 1-26; *idem*, 'The Final Phase', in Todd (ed.), *Companion to Roman Britain*, pp. 428-42; Woolf, 'Romans to Barbarians', pp. 346-54.

patronage and taxation system,[82] leading to a decline of Roman identities in eastern Britain. In these regions, of course, Britishness as an identity also 'failed'. Influenced by recent and continuing events in Europe and the Middle East, scholars working on the end of imperial rule in Britain have begun to conceptualise late- and post-Roman Britain as a 'collapsed' state.[83] Laycock and Esmonde Cleary have, indeed, argued that Britishness was a Roman creation designed to suppress the already deeply-embedded 'tribal' identities existing in Britain prior to the Roman invasion. With the removal of state power, Britishness failed and tribal identities returned to the surface.[84] Bryan Ward-Perkins has suggested, moreover, that the incoming Germanic peoples were not confronted by a powerful Romano-British culture, leading to the dominance of Anglo-Saxon identities in the east.[85]

Britain and Late Antiquity

Regardless of whether one accepts or refutes the romanization paradigm, this debate leads directly to more recent scholarly debates in regards to Britain, in particular concerns with island's place within the world of late antiquity. For Peter Brown, the world of late antiquity, or the cultural and social transformations that defined the period between around 200 to 700 were seen most vividly in the eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia, with the cold northern lands, including of course Britain and Gaul, beyond his remit.[86] It was in the Byzantine east, where Greek was the language of culture, that Brown saw both the greatest innvovations and continuities in the period, with classical art and literature continuing to

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[82] G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West 376-568* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 195-200.

[83] S. Laycock, *Britannia: The Failed State. Tribal Conflicts and the End of Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2008), pp. 7-14; S. Esmonde Cleary, 'Southern Britain in the fifth century: a 'collapsed state'?', in F. Hunter and K. Painter (eds.), *Late Roman Silver. The Traprain Treasure in Context* (Edinburgh, 2013), pp. 45-56.

[84] Laycock, *Failed State*, pp. 135-68.

[85] B. Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', *EHR* 115 (2000), 513–33 at 519–20.

[86] Brown, *Late Antiquity*, p. 9.

maintain its prestige while, at the same moment, Christianity flourished at the expense of Roman paganism.[87] Further east and in parts of the former empire conquered by the Arabs, Islamic culture came to dominate, with distinctive yet somewhat familiar forms of artistic expression coming to signify this new religious and cultural phenomemnon.[88] What is more, the persistence of urbanism in the eastern Mediterranean, albeit in altered form throughout the late antique period continued to mark the region as distinctive and connected to its ancient Greek ancient past.

Given the differences between Roman Britain and the eastern Mediterranean, Brown's reluctance to include the northern world in his definition of late antiquity might be justified. There was, for example, little or indeed no continuity in urbanism in fourth and fifth century Britain, and the south and east of the former diocese which had seen the establishment of urban centres and villa society are those in which virtually no trace of the culture of the empire survivied.[89] Two general interpretations have been provided to explain urban transformation in later Roman Britain. The first model regards the towns of Roman Britain to be terminal decline from around 250 onwards, with fourth-century towns, let alone their fifth-century successors being fundamentally different to their predecessors.[90] Richard Reece, for instance, regards Romano-British towns as mere administrative villages – rural landscapes dominated by high-status masonry buildings within city walls.[91] Neil Faulkner, while arguing for decline, suggests that later town life persisted at a level higher than Reece's conception of 'administrative villages' before succumbing to dereliction.[92] The second 'late

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[87] Brown, *Late Antiquity*, pp. 49-114.

[88] Brown, *Late Antiquity*, pp. 194-204.

[89] In general, see Wacher, *Towns*, pp. 408-11; Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, pp. 134-42; Esmonde Cleary, *ERB*, pp. 64-85, 145-57; Wickham, *Framing*, pp. 591-6.

[90] Reece, 'Town and Country'; N. Faulkner, 'Later Roman Colchester', *OJA* 13 (1994), 93-120, at 105.

[91] Reece, 'Town and Country', 85-9.

[92] Faulkner, 'Later Roman Colchester', 105-14.

antique' interpretation, postulated by Frere, views fourth- and fifth-century towns as the linear descendants of their second-century predecessors – that is, as successful, thriving urban communities with a dense population, dependent upon supply from rural producers, with a range of craft and tradespersons participating in 'industries' alongside a rich and influential urban elite still living a life of 'romanised' luxury.[93] This model of late antique urbanism has been extended by Roger White and Philip Barker to Wroxeter, the 'capital' of the Cornovii, where extensive excavation has revealed sixth-century occupation and the use of Roman measurements in the construction of timber buildings.[94] In relation to Wroxeter, Alan Lane has refuted White and Barker's claims of continuity, arguing that the town bears comparison with other urban sites from late Roman Britain which show abandonment in the late fourth/early fifth centuries.[95]

It is therefore somewhat paradoxical that the areas of Roman Britain – the western and northern provinces – which experienced the least 'romanization' are precisely those same areas which demonstrate an articulation of *romanitas* in the immediately post-Roman era.[96] Use of roman-letter inscribed stones and material culture of Gallic and Mediterranean provenance, for example, has been seen as attempts by certain groups in fifth- and sixth-century western and northern Britain to 'stay Roman'.[97] In addition, the writings of Gildas demonstrate that a high level of literary sophistication continued in Britain. We might, then,

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[93] S. Frere, *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain* (3rd edn., London, 1987), pp. 245-7.

[94] White and Barker, *Wroxeter*, pp. 118-36.

[95] A. Lane, 'Wroxeter and the End of Roman Britain', *Antiquity* 88 (2014), 501-15.

[96] Dark, *Britain*, pp. 150-78; E. Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports to Atlantic Britain and Ireland, AD 400-800*, CBA Research Report 157 (York, 2007), pp. 125-39; A. Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West: The Archaeology of Cultural Identity AD 400-650* (Stroud, 2003), pp. 145-61.

[97] M. Henig, 'Remaining Roman in Britain, AD 300-700: The evidence of portable art', in R. Collins and J. Gerrard, *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD 300-700*, BAR Brit. Ser. 365 (Oxford, 2004), pp. 13-24. For *romanitas* in other areas of the (former) western empire, see J. Conant, *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439-700* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 49-64, 294-5.

resist the notion of measuring everything against the cultural and literary sophistication of the eastern Roman empire and accept a degree of elasticity in the late antique paradigm which an include those areas of Britain which in the fifth and sixth centuries demonstrate clear cultural affinities with other areas of the late Roman world. The most notable advocat for this view is Ken Dark, who suggests parts of western and northern Britain were the epitome of late antique *romanitas*:

> Rather than being the area of the former Roman West in which Late Roman culture was most entirely swept away in the fifth century, and in which exceptional curiously archaic local cultures flourished, quite the opposite would seem to be true. It was within the mainstream, but was the only part of the West in which the descendants of Roman citizens lived under their own rule, with their own Romano-Christian culture and in recognisably Late Roman political units into the sixth century.[98]

In particular Dark to concluded on the basis of the archaeological evidence that *Britannia Prima*'s 'highland zone' was very much part of the late antique world.[99] Yet Dark's hypothesis has not been met with universal approval. Indeed, scholars such as Neil Faulkner have urged caution in the interpretations of the fifth and sixth centuries, suggesting instead that the surviving material evidence is indicative of decline and the onset of a dark age.[100]

It is evident, then, that much scholarly ink continues to be spilt on the nature of Britain's cultural sophistication and its interaction with the Roman empire, both in the Roman and post-Roman periods. This extends to the nature of power in the immediately post-Roman

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[98] Dark, *Britain*, p. 230.

[99] Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 50-136; *idem*, *Britain*, pp. 105-192.

[100] N. Faulkner, 'The Case for the Dark Ages', in eds. R. Collins & J. Gerrard, *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD 300-700,* BAR Brit. Ser. 365 (Oxford, 2004), pp. 5-12, at pp. 5-10. Cf. Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*, pp. 120-22.

world and the type of political units that emerged in this period. Most prominently, Dark has argued for continuity existing between the late Roman administrative units known as *civitates* and the emergent kingdoms of the early medieval period. Again, this has not met with universal endorsement. However, it represents a major advance in our understanding of political and cultural developments in late and immediately post-Roman Britain, forcing us to shed notions of a return to primitive Celticism, though this has not been eradicated entirely. For instance, Roger White has argued that for the elites of eastern *Britannia Prima*

> …dress and display became vital to demonstrate one's place in society. Behaviour too will have changed. Instead of spouting Virgil or Ovid, they might spend their time feasting or fighting.[101]

Here, we find the Britons descending into barbarity, shedding the trappings of *romanitas* for more primitive pastimes: elite power in sub-Roman Britain, indeed, appears to be conceptualised in different terms. It should therefore come as no surprise that there is a temptation amongst some scholars to view political developments in post-Roman Britain as decidedly 'other'. For instance, Ian Wood claims that:

> Britain can, of course, be seen as experiencing a history radically different from that even of the other parts of western Europe. Its western half was one of only two areas of the erstwhile Roman empire to witness *the re-emergence of Celtic kings*, and the other area where a similar development occurred, Brittany, had a history inseparable from that of Britain itself.[102]

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[101] White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 169-70.

[102] I. N. Wood, 'The North-Western Provinces', in *Cambridge Ancient History Vol. XIV Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A.D. 400-625*, eds. A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins and M. Whitby, pp. 497-524, at p. 497 (emphasis added).

Despite the links between Britain and Brittany in the late antique period, it has been decided to omit discussion of them, as discussed above, for reasons of brevity. Although this was an important development, the primary source material dealt with in the thesis lends itself to a consolidated inspection of the changing notions of Britishness within Britain and thus the argument proceeds on this basis. Returning to Wood's comment, it must be stressed that within the thesis the notion of the re-emergence of Celtic kings in Britain is avoided. Even if we could define more precisely what Wood meant by the label 'Celtic', the political units of the fifth and sixth centuries were new formations, not a return to some primitive 'tribal', 'Celtic' past. Undoubtedly, however, there was an emphasis on ancestral identities in western Britain, detectable through the (re-)use of the landscape,[103] personal ornament,[104] and the preservation of *civitas* identities which occur in the textual and epigraphic record. Wedded to the occurrence of Irish personal names and ogam inscribed funerary monuments,[105] the evidence suggests that, like other areas of the (former) western Roman empire such as Gaul,[106] Britain was subject to a process of regionalisation. However, as this thesis pursues the notion of multiple, syncretic identities being perpetuated amongst the groups in the western and northern Brittonic zones, it is possible to acknowledge that numerous factors, including interaction by land and sea, facilitated the exchange of ideas and material cultures which contributed to the creation and expression of identities amongst an emergent political

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[103] D. Petts, 'The Reuse of Prehistoric Standing Stones in Western Britain? A Critical consideration of an Aspect of Early Medieval Monument Reuse', *OJA* 21 (2002), 195-209; Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 172-84, 191-216.

[104] S. Youngs, 'Fine Metalwork to *c*. AD 650', in *idem* (ed), *'The Work of Angels': Masterpieces of Celtic Metalwork, 6th-9th Centuries AD* (London, 1989), pp. 20-71, at p. 20.

[105] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 174-88; C. Thomas, *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak?*, pp. 41-66; P. Rance, 'Attacotti, Déisi and Magnus Maximus: The Case for Irish Federates in Late Roman Britain', *Britannia* 32 (2001), 243-70; N. Edwards, 'Early Medieval sculpture in south-west Wales: the Irish Sea connection', in R. Moss (ed.), *Making and Meaning in Insular Art. Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Insular Art held at Trinity College Dublin, 25-28 August 2005* (Dublin, 2007), pp. 184-97.

[106] Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, pp. 15-16, 23, 31; Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*, pp. 104-10; D. Moore (ed.), *The Irish Sea Province in Archaeology and History* (Cardiff, 1970); White, *Britannia Prima*, 149-76.

elite. Indeed, we should see this process as part of a complex renegotiation of identities, which included claims of continuity from the pre-Roman past and links with the Roman present, through the use of various mechanisms which expressed political authority without necessarily being predicated solely upon notions of either *romanitas* or 'Celtic-ness'.

Frontier *Gentes*

The notion of Roman frontiers as 'zones of interaction' which stimulated the formation of border *gentes* has been greatly elucidated by the seminal work of C. R. Whittaker.[107] Particularly valuable is his conception of the frontier as a broad social and economic zone in which ties of interaction bound the Roman military and particular frontier groups into a relationship of mutual interdependence. This association, expressed through shared material culture, distinguished these communities, not from one another, but from the bulk of the rural populace who dwelt on both sides of the *limes*.[108] The creation of frontier *gentes* is a phenomenon particularly apparent on the Rhine-Danube *limes* where as a consequence of imperial largess, targeted diplomacy and the imposition of 'kings', or, on the other hand, the very real threat posed to these small-scale 'barbarian' societies by the Roman war-machine, large confederations, such as the Franks, Goths and Alamanni, formed on the boundaries of the empire.[109] Similar phenomenon seems to have occurred in Britain. However, the British

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[107] C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore and London, 1994), pp. 98-131.

[108] Whittaker, *Frontiers*, pp. 121-30. On the meaning of *limes*, see B. Isaac, 'The meaning of the terms *Limes and Limitanei*', *JRS* 78 (1988), 125-47; J. W. Drijvers, 'The Limits of the Empire in the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus', in O. Heckster and T. Kaiser (eds.), *Frontiers in the Roman World. Proceedings of the Ninth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Rome* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 13-29, at pp. 18-25.

[109] P. J. Heather, 'Holding the Line: Frontier defense and the Later Roman Empire', in V. D. Hanson (ed.), *Makers of Ancient Strategy: From the Persian Wars to the Fall of Rome* (Princeton, 2010), pp. 227-46, at pp. 230-5; L. F. Pitts, 'Relations between Rome and the German "Kings" on the Middle Danube in the First to Fourth Centuries A.D.', *JRS* 79 (1989), 45-58; H. Elton, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (Bloomington, 1996), pp. 29-38; M. Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 71-99; R. Seager, 'Roman policy on the

situation is problematic for while Frankish and Alamannic ethnogenesis took place on the very boundaries of the Empire, the formation of the barbarian confederation in northern Britain, first 'British' then 'Pictish', occurred, apparently at least, not on the Hadrianic frontier but around the Antonine Wall, the linear earthwork occupied between the 140s and the 160s.[110]

This places the intramural communities in an ambiguous position. Most scholars regard these groups as Britons.[111] Guy Halsall, on the other hand, views the southern Pictish confederacy of the later Roman period as beginning at Hadrian's Wall, submerging intramural groups such as the Maeatae and Votadini beneath a Caledonian Pictish identity.[112] It is certain, however, that during the early medieval period the intramural peoples were regarded as Britons. For some, this is the consequence of their status as Roman clients 'hired' to guard the northern frontier against the Picts.[113] The most sophisticated exponent of this

Rhine and the Danube in Ammianus', *CQ* 49 (1999), 579-605, at 587-604; H. J. Hummer, 'Franks and Alamanni: A Discontinuous Ethnogenesis', in I. N. Wood (ed.), *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period. An Ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 9-21, at pp. 11-17; *idem*, 'The fluidity of barbarian identity: the ethnogenesis of the Alemanni and Suebi, AD 200-500', *EME* 7 (1998), 1-27; E. James, *The Franks* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 35-51; H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. T. Dunlap (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 43-75, esp. 57-64; J. F. Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome, 213-496 (Caracalla to Clovis)* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 41-116.

[110] Fraser, *Caledonia*, 20, 22-9, 44-61; W. S. Hanson and G. S. Maxwell, *Rome's North West Frontier: The Antonine Wall* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 137-43; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 34-6.

[111] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 33; A. P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000* (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 14-19; Fraser, *Caledonia*, pp. 44-47.

[112] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 114-15; *idem*, 'Northern Britain and the Fall of the Roman Empire', *The Medieval Journal* 12 (2012), 1-25, at 10, 14-15. See Chs. 3-4.

[113] R. Collins, *Hadrian's Wall and the End of Empire* (New York, 2012), pp. 154-70; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 35; F. Hunter, 'Beyond the frontier: interpreting late Roman Iron Age indigenous and imported material culture', in R. Collins and L. Allason-Jones (eds.), *Finds from the Frontier*, pp. 96-109 at p. 100; Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, pp. 14-19; I. Richmond, 'The fourth century and after' in *idem* (ed.), *Roman and Native in North Britain* (Edinburgh, 1958), pp. 112-30; Frere, *Britannia*, pp. 164-5; J. Rhys, *Celtic Britain* (London, 1904), pp. 103, 118-19.

'buffer-state hypothesis', John Morris – whose 1973 analysis fits almost seamlessly with current theories of frontier ethnogenesis – argued that in the aftermath of the 'barbarian conspiracy' of 367, *comes* Theodosius, paralleling his activities in Africa, established *praefecti gentium* over the intramural peoples who in turn bequeathed their power to their sons and successors, thereby founding the North British kingdoms.[114] Based upon the presence of 'Roman' names such as Cluim, Donatus and Paternus *Pesrut* ('of the Red Cloak') in the north British lineages,[115] this hypothesis has proved incredibly resilient and has recently been repeated verbatim by John Vanderspoel.[116] However, the optimism placed by Morris and his predecessors in the tenth-century Harleian genealogies has not met with universal approval: Kenneth Jackson, for instance, declared that 'Roman' names in genealogies cannot be regarded as independent witness to the events of the late fourth century, let alone testimony to imperial 'frontier policy', and may represent a desire by Christian dynasties to appropriate the power of *romanitas*.[117] While it is possible to disregard the genealogical information as late and subject to processes of political manipulation, archaeological evidence suggests close contact between Roman and barbarian on Britain's northern frontier which no doubt played a crucial role in the formation of frontier *gentes*.[118]

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[114] J. Morris, *The Age of Arthur: A History of the British Isles from 350 to 650* (London, 1973), p. 17; Theodosius in Africa, see Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 29.5.35. Not so for J. C. Mann, 'The Northern Frontier After A. D. 369', *Glasgow Archaeological Journal* 3 (1974), 34-42, who sees a lessening of interaction in the last decades of the fourth century.

[115] Bartrum, *HG*, 1, 3.

[116] J. Vanderspoel, 'From Empire to Kingdoms', in P. Rousseau (ed.), *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Chichester, 2009), pp. 426-40, at pp. 434-6.

[117] K. H. Jackson, 'The Britons of southern Scotland', *Antiquity* 29 (1955), 77-88, at 80.

[118] S. Esmonde Cleary 'Northern Britain in Late Antiquity', *AnTard* 21 (2013), 33-44, at 40-3; Collins, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 126-8; Hunter, 'Beyond the frontier', pp. 98-100.

'Ethnogenesis'[119] was not confined to the frontier peoples. Similar processes appear to have been at work amongst the frontier garrisons, amongst whom a distinctive identity emerged during the late Roman period.[120] According to Halsall, the creation of this frontier identity resulted from a 'major re-organisation' of the northern frontier under the usurper Magnus Maximus (383-88), which separated the northern garrisons from the provincial army of southern Britain.[121] On the absence of official belt-sets from the frontier zone, which are generally not found much beyond East Yorkshire, Halsall suggests that regular forces were withdrawn from the Wall and redeployed further south; subsequently, defence of the frontier was turned over to local leaders, possibly officers of the *limitanei* or other frontier aristocrats.[122] The identity expressed by the *limitanei* has been subject to two rival interpretations: the first, envisions the formation of a 'community of interest' amongst the *limitanei* who were 'locally embedded: economically, socially and culturally'.[123] The second perceives significant Germanic cultural and linguistic influence amongst the northern frontier peoples.[124] Ian Wood has declared, for example, that in the northern frontier zone 'Not

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[119] See below, pp. 42-6.

[120] Collins, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 74-110; *idem*, 'Military Communities and Transformation of the Frontier from the Fourth to the Sixth Centuries', in D. Petts and S. Turner (eds.), *Early Medieval Northumbria: Kingdoms and Communities, AD 450-1100* (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 15-34, at pp. 21-31; T. Wilmott, 'The late Roman frontier: a structural background', in Collins and Allason-Jones (eds.), *Finds from the Frontier*, pp. 10-16; K. R. Dark, 'A sub-Roman re-defence of Hadrian's Wall?', *Britannia* 23 (1992), 111-20.

[121] Halsall, 'Northern Britain', 10-13; *idem*, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 196-7.

[122] Halsall, 'Northern Britain', 12-13. For similar observations, cf. R. G. Collingwood, 'The Roman Evacuation of Britain', *JRS* 12 (1922), 74-98, at 77-8.

[123] R. Collins, 'Soldiers to warriors: renegotiating the Roman frontier in the fifth century', in F. Hunter and K. Painter (eds.), *Late Roman Silver. The Traprain Treasure in Context* (Edinburgh, 2013), pp. 29-44, at p. 37; *idem*, *Hadrian's Wall and the End of Empire*, pp. 109-110; P. Bidwell and A. Croom, 'The supply and use of pottery on Hadrian's Wall in the 4th century AD', in Collins and Allason-Jones (eds.), *Finds from the Frontier*, pp. 20-36, at pp. 29-31.

[124] C. Clay, 'Before there were Angles, Saxons and Jutes: an epigraphic study of the Germanic social, religious and linguistic relations on Hadrian's Wall', in ed. L. A. Gilmour, *Pagans and Christians: From Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, BAR Int. Ser. 1610 (Oxford, 2007), pp. 47-64; F. Orton and I. Wood, *Fragments of History:*

everyone would have seen himself or herself as Roman, Romano-British or British'.[125]

Instead, he suggests on the basis of inscriptions recording the presence of *Germani* that an

embryonic Germanic identity prevailed in the frontier zone, both to the north and south of the

Wall which contributed to the eventual formation of the Anglian Bernicii.[126] These

interpretations relate directly to modern academic concerns with ethnic identity, and to this

matter we turn now.

Ethnicity

To nineteenth-century historians, ethnicity was an immutable biological fact. Membership of

an ethnic group or 'race' – that is, a biologically homogenous group, was a fixed and natural

designation, determined by blood and ancestry. Nations were thus timeless, natural entities;

each possessed certain racial qualities which were considered to define the personality of the

nation, the physicality and physiological characteristics of individual members of the race

(usually men) and its political institutions. This was, in part, the legacy of Greek and Roman

ethnographic writing.[127]

Most regrettably, this supposed racial purity was seen as the fundamental element

which separated one nation from another. E.A Freeman, for example, considered the

expulsion or slaughter of the lowland Britons during the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons as

prerequisite to the later success of the English as a nation.[128] Freeman's ideas and those of

other historians such as J.R. Green were ultimately dictated by the contemporary social and

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Rethinking the Ruthwell and Newcastle Monuments (Manchester, 2007), pp. 110-15; A. Birley, *The People of Roman Britain* (London, 1979), Ch. 10.

[125] Orton and Wood, *Fragments of History*, pp. 113-14.

[126] Orton and Wood, *Fragments of History*, pp. 113-14; B. K. Roberts, 'Northumbrian origins and post-Roman continuity: an exploration', in Collins and Allason-Jones (eds.), *Finds from the Frontier*, pp. 120-32, at p. 120.

[127] See Ch. 2.

[128] E. A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest* (6 vols., Oxford, 1867-79), I. p. 18.

political context which viewed the English people as a Teutonic race, descendants of the Germanic peoples of 'Free Germany', and therefore superior to the so-called 'Celtic' peoples of the British Isles – the Irish, Scots and Welsh.[129] Though shorn of earlier racist overtones, notable twentieth-century scholars such as Frank Stenton viewed the formation of the English people and nation as a linear process relating to the political vision of early medieval kings, and their desire for a pan-English authority substantiated through the office of the *bretwalda*.[130] The notion that racial or ethnic identity was defined by immutable biological factors nevertheless was not confined to English historiography. John Rhys, for example, argued that though the early 'tribes' of western Wales share linguistic characteristics with other more easterly groups, they 'cannot be regarded as wholly Brythons in point of blood'.[131] Rhys's work, moreover, as made explicit in its title, *Celtic Britain*, gave the indigenous Brython an illustrious history as one the ancient cultures of pre-Roman Europe, far older than that of the English.

This biological view of ethnicity, termed 'primordialist' by anthropologists was shaken, though not wholly disposed of, in the aftermath of the Second World War. Whilst the primordialist view of ethnicity has retained some adherents amongst historians,[132] current anthropological theory has greatly increased the scope of interpretation and analysis of ethnicity in the early middle ages. In particular, the 'instrumentalist' model, pioneered by Frederick Barth and his study of the Swat Pathans of Afghanistan and Pakistan, sees ethnicity as an adaptable and malleable aspect of identity, defined by the concept of belief in

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[129] J. R. Green, *A Short History of the English People* (London, 1874); see, R. J. C. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 40-70.

[130] F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (3rd edn. Oxford, 1971).

[131] Rhys, *Celtic Britain*, pp. 2-4.

[132] J. C. Russel, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (Oxford, 1994), p. 14.

membership of an ethnic group.[133] Barth's conclusion, that ethnicity was deployed to signal

political affiliation, has subsequently influenced studies of late antique and early medieval

identities.[134] A.D. Smith has further argued that individual participation in cultural practices

contributed to the cognitive formation and perpetuation of wider group identities constituting

the ethnic unit.[135]

In the early middle ages, group identities had to be 'constantly reproduced by human

activity' such as political and religious assemblies and/or the use of cultural symbols to

denoting membership of an ethnic group.[136] These activities could also include the use of

cremation and furnished inhumations burials, though whether this represent an 'ethnic

practice', rather than a statement of social status and local identity has been hotly

contested.[137] Patrick Geary has stated that ethnicity was a 'situational construct', applicable in

certain contexts and usually an expression of political authority, connected with the command

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[133] F. Barth 'Pathan Identity and its Maintenance', in *idem* (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston, 1969), pp. 117-34.

[134] E.g. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 36-45.

[135] A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 22-46.

[136] W. Pohl, 'Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies' in L. K. Little & B. H. Rosenwein (eds.), *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* (Malden, 1998), pp. 15-24, at p. 17.

[137] H. Harke, 'Anglo-Saxon Migration and Ethnogenesis', *MA* 55 (2011), 1-28; H. Harke, '"Warrior Graves"? The Background of the Anglo-Saxon Weapon Burial Rite', *P&P* 126 (1990), 22-43; S. Lucy 'Early Medieval burials in East Yorkshire: reconsidering the evidence', in H. Geake and J. Kenny, (eds.), *Early Deira: Archaeological studies of the East Riding in the Fourth to Ninth Centuries AD* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 11-8; S. Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 83-95, 174-81; *idem* 'Burial practice in early medieval eastern England: constructing local identities, deconstructing ethnicity', in S. Lucy and A. Reynolds (eds.), *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales* (London, 2002), pp. 72-87; B. Yorke, 'Anglo-Saxon Origin Legends' in J. Barrow and A. Wareham (eds.), *Myths, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicolas Brooks* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 15-29, at pp. 21-4; G. Halsall, 'The origins of the Reihengraberzivilisation: forty years on', in Drinkwater and Elton (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul*, pp. 196-207, at 205-7.

of armies or association with kings.[138] Membership of an early medieval *gens* such as the *gens Francorum* or the *gens Burgundionum*, therefore 'did not depend on shared cultural, linguistic or legal backgrounds', and certainly not on biological factors, but rather on being a free-born warrior and participation in the *exercitus*.[139]

Walter Pohl has suggested that 'ethnic discourse such as origin legends and laws, customs and languages, were created to form an ethnic dialogue through which power could be facilitated, in order to both include and exclude members of society from the political community'.[140] Immediate political circumstances, moreover, in which various groups found themselves therefore produced 'a community bound together by belief in common descent and actual common interests'.[141] As stated by Edward James, 'early medieval peoples are not biological entities, like races; sometimes they appear to be no more than men and women who are temporarily grouped together, by others, by themselves or, more commonly, by their leaders'.[142] Though we might contest the distinction between a race and an early medieval people, it is clear that kingship was a focus for communal political identities in late antiquity; indeed, 'peoples did not produce kings; kings produced peoples'.[143]

Much of this recent re-evaluation owes it origins to the work of Reinhard Wenskus and his academic descendants Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl, which has striven to discard

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[138] P. Geary, 'Ethnic identity as a situational construct in the Early Middle Ages', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, 113 (1983), 15-26

[139] Ibid.

[140] W. Pohl, 'Telling the difference: Signs of ethnic identity', in Pohl (ed.), *Strategies of Distinction*, pp. 17-71.

[141] P. Amory, 'Names, ethnic identity, and community in fifth- and sixth-century Burgundy', *Viator* 25 (1994), 1-30, at 4-5.

[142] E. James, 'The Barbarian Kingdoms', in S. Basset (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester, 1989), pp. 40-54, at pp. 47-8.

[143] James, 'Barbarian Kingdoms', p. 47.

the biological approach to ethnicity.[144] Instead, the 'ethnogenesis' model views the formation

of peoples and kingdoms as historical processes rather than as natural phenomenon in which

the creation of political entities depended on the interaction between 'Roman' and 'barbarian'

on and within the imperial boundaries. According to Patrick Geary, in fact, the barbarians

may have owed their very origins, in political terms, to Roman diplomatic and ethnographic

activity: 'the Germanic world was perhaps the greatest and most enduring creation of Roman

political and military genius'.[145] Central to this approach is the *Traditionskern* ('kernel of

tradition') theory in which groups of miscellaneous warriors attach themselves to a dominant

warrior elite, accepted their time-honoured traditions and become a new ethnic group or *gens*.

In Wolfram's estimation, the *Traditionskern* was embodied by the dominant families such as

the Gothic Amal dynasty, and stretched back unbroken to time immemorial, until finally

written down in order to honour the dignity of the barbarian kingships in their new Roman

and Christian setting.[146] According to Wolfram there are three traditional motifs containing

the ethnic traditions of a people: a primordial deed, under the guidance of a god, such as a

great battle or the crossing of a major body of water; a change of cult or religion which takes

place during the primordial deed; and a communal memory that a rival ethnic group, from

which the new tribe had broken away, continued to be the hereditary enemy of the tribe

regardless of the historical circumstances.[147]

Wolfram claims that 'the process of demystification [of the origin legends] can only

be accomplished by giving the myths their due'.[148] However, the existence of time-honoured

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[144] R. Wenkus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen gentes* (Cologne, 1961); Wolfram, *The Goths*, Chs. 1-3; *idem*, *Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*.

[145] P. J. Geary, *Before France and Germany* (New York, 1988), p. vi.

[146] H. Wolfram, '*Origo et religio*: Ethnic traditions and literature in early medieval texts', *EME* 3 (1994), 19-38, at 22-9.

[147] Wolfram, *Roman Empire and Germanic Peoples*, pp. 33-4.

[148] Wolfram, '*Origo et religio*', 19.

traditions amongst the peoples of early medieval Europe has come under close scrutiny, particularly from Walter Goffart and others.[149] In fact, the ethnogenesis model has come under extreme criticism, particularly the concept of a core tradition-bearing *gens* and the notion that rulers regarded themselves as kings rather than Roman officers.[150] Patrick Amory also dismisses ethnogenesis and the *Traditionskern* model. Instead, he argues that in Ostrogothic Italy 'barbarian' identities were un-connected to the arrival of 'Germanic' barbarians in the Empire but indicative of social distinctions between soldier and civilian, and political affiliation to the Gothic kingship.[151] Amory suggests classical ethnographic traditions, emanating from Ravenna and Constantinople, were used by rival polities in opposition to one another for political reasons.[152]

The ethnogenesis model has nonetheless gained adherents within insular scholarship, particularly amongst Anglo-Saxonists. While earlier generations of scholars did not use this term, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* was, and is, seen as formative in the creation of English identity.[153] The ethnogenesis model has been applied to other texts. For example, E.T.A. Dailey has argued that the anonymous Whitby *Vita Gregorii* was part of the

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[149] W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988); *idem*, *Barbarian Tides. The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, 2006), pp. 56-72; *idem*, 'Does the Distant Past Impinge on the Invasion Age Germans?', in A. Gillet (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity. Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 21-38, at 31-8.

[150] C. R. Bowlus, 'Ethnogenesis: The Tyranny of a Concept', in Gillet (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity*, pp. 241-56, at pp. 243-51; A. Gillet, 'Was Ethnicity Politicized in the Earliest Medieval Kingdoms?', in *idem* (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity*, pp. 85-123, at pp. 111, 118.

[151] Amory, *People and Identity*, pp. 149-94.

[152] Amory, *People and Identity*, pp. 44-85, 86-108.

[153] H. E .J. Cowdrey, 'Bede and the English People', *Journal of Religious History*, 11 (1981), 501-23; P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *gens Anglorum*', in *idem* (ed.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99-129; *idem*, '*Engla Lond*: the Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), 1-24; S. Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *TRHS* 6th Ser. 6 (1996), 25-49.

'dynamic and complex process of ethnogenesis' amongst the English. In particular, the cultivation by the Anglo-Saxon church of traditions associated with Pope Gregory and his role in the conversion are seen as playing an important role in the formation of an 'English' identity.[154] Strictly speaking, *Vita Gregorii* does not contain *Traditionskern* material of the type identified by Wolfram. Here, the methodological criteria of the ethnogenesis model have been abandoned due to the seduction of the term, something that perhaps applies to Woolf's discussion of the Britons.[155] The wider application of the term, though useful, perhaps requires qualification lest all historical processes and the relevant sources be consumed within this academic paradigm.

The approaches and methodologies applied to the investigation of early medieval peoples and kingdoms on the continent and England, therefore, may not offer a direct template for the study of the Britons. Ethnogenesis, for example, in its strictest sense, cannot apply to the Britons: as an indigenous citizen population they did not go through the required elements as set out by Wolfram. Nevertheless, the model itself seems to have overcome Wolfram's strictures, being seen as both a physical process of group formation and a method by which to interrogate early medieval texts. This thesis argues that British ethnic identity and regional Brittonic identities were made and remade in this period; thus, it is useful to apply the ethnogenesis model to our understanding and interpretations both of the archaeological and textual evidence which helped in the creation of Brittonic regional and ethnic identity.

Taken in combination, current historical and anthropological views on ethnicity provide a working definition of ethnicity as a situational construct, mutable in nature,

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[154] E. T. A. Dailey, 'The *Vita Gregorii* and Ethnogenesis in Anglo-Saxon Britain', *NH* 67 (2010), 195-207 at 207; Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the *gens Anglorum*', pp. 99-129.

[155] Woolf, 'Romans to Barbarians', p. 380.

designed to satisfy current political circumstances and to signal affiliation to a wider group identity based upon political authority. Interpretation of early medieval texts might suggest that contemporary authors defined political identities, that is, membership of a people or *gens*, as being held by a limited proportion of society, the weapon-bearing elite who were in service to a king. As such, the majority of society, excluded from political and ethnic discourse, might be seen to not have required such labelling. However, as we shall see, ethnic identity could be applied to individuals below the level of the warrior elite, often to assert their inferior status.[156] It is important, however, to consider that ethnicity was only one element in an individual's identity; others such as kinship, social status and gender may well have been of greater importance in certain contexts.[157] Most importantly, however, we must remember that ethnic and regional identities were constructs requiring acknowledgement and participation for their continuing importance. It is, then, to the construction of Roman period Britishness that we now turn.

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[156] See Ch. 7.

[157] On gender, see L. Brubaker and J. M. H. Smith (eds.), *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900* (Cambridge, 2004).

Part I: The Making of Britishness

Chapter 2: Defining Britishness

Introduction

This chapter has two primary aims. First, through an analysis of Roman 'conquest narratives'
from Caesar to Cassius Dio, as well as imperial poetry, it examines the creation of Britishness
as a Roman historiographical and ethnographical concept, which, it will be argued, served to
'other' this society and provide justification for the conquest of the Britons and their
incorporation into the empire. Second, this chapter will begin to analyse the creation of
British provincial identity amongst the civilian inhabitants of the Roman province of
Britannia. Arguing that ethnographic Britishness was a problematic construct due to the
ethnonym *Britanni* referring to both provincial and barbaric Britons, it will be suggested that
ambiguity over the status of the island and its inhabitants existed in the Roman mind.
Nonetheless, it will also discuss the gradual 'ethnogenesis' of the provincial Britons as an
imperial people as they were slowly integrated into the wider Roman world.

Ethnography

According to P. C. N. Stewart, the 'crystallisation of the rhetorical repertory for describing
Britain and the British' took place within Roman society in the aftermath of the Caesarean
(55/53 B.C.) and Claudian invasions (A.D. 43) of Britain.[1] *Britannia* was thus a literary
creation which dispensed with first-hand knowledge gained from Britain's entry into the
Empire; the island remaining an ideological and cultural reference point, 'not a place, but an
idea…inconstant and adaptable'.[2] Katherine Clarke meanwhile argues that Tacitus sought to

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[1] P. C. N. Stewart, 'Inventing Britain: The Roman Creation and Adaptation of an Image', *Britannia* 26 (1995),
1-10.

[2] Stewart, 'Inventing Britain', 1-2.

erode the image of Britain as an isolated and distant island found in early imperial rhetoric. Rather, Clarke argues, Tacitus downplayed perceptions of Britain's insularity, thereby bringing the island within the bounds of Roman knowledge and *imperium*.[3] For Gregg Woolf, Roman ethnographic descriptions of provincial societies were 'enduring fictions' which persisted throughout the Roman dominion of Europe as the necessary backdrop to imperial campaigns and triumphs.[4] Juxtaposing the ethnographic writings of Tacitus and Cassius Dio, Woolf claims that knowledge of Britain had not advanced in the two centuries separating these authors, leading to the creation of a static ethnographic image.[5]

The ethnographic image of the Britons was part of a tradition reaching back to the authors of Hellenic antiquity such as Herodotus who sought to record the origins, appearance and customs of various barbarian peoples which surrounded the civilized world.[6] 'Ethnography' as a discipline however was an early nineteenth-century invention used to classify the documentation of 'exotic' peoples, notably the populations of Asia and Africa. While the ancients sought to record the *mores* of non-Greek/Roman peoples, ethnography itself was not a literary genre but rather a set of formulaic conventions often used as digressions and exemplars within existing literary forms such as, poetry, letter writing, speeches and works of history and geography.[7] To modern sensibilities, perhaps, poetry and history belong in separate categories; however, in antiquity ethnographic knowledge was

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[3] K. Clarke, 'An island nation. Re-reading Tacitus' *Agricola*', *JRS* 91 (2001), 94-112, at 100-4.

[4] G. Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians: Ethnography and Empire in the Roman West* (Malden, 2011), pp. 89-94.

[5] Ibid., p. 93.

[6] Ethnography: Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians*, pp. 13-17. Victory ideology: M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 11-34. Monumental sculpture: I. M. Ferris, *Enemies of Rome. Barbarians Through Roman Eyes* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 30-84. Poetry: T. Habinek, 'Ovid and Empire' in P. Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 46-61; R. F. Thomas, *Lands and Peoples in Roman Poetry: The Ethnographical Tradition* (Cambridge, 1982).

[7] Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians*, pp. 13-17.

regularly shared between literary and visual forms resulting in standard images of certain peoples being disseminated widely within the 'civilized' world.

These matters had long been of interest to the dominant Mediterranean cultural powers and prior to the emergence of Rome, Greek-speakers had classified all non-Greek speakers as *βαρβαροι* 'Barbarians'. All peoples dwelling outside this linguistic category, including the Romans, were deemed barbaric. In the course of the Roman ascendancy, the emergent superpower absorbed, altered, and utilised this Hellenic principle, subtly remoulding the *barbarus* paradigm. No longer was barbarity defined by linguistic criteria, which had previously cast Rome asunder from the civilised world; now distinctions between the modalities of existence separated the civilised from the barbaric.

The attributes that encapsulated 'Romanness' – urbanity, civic life, literary education and agriculture – were now juxtaposed with the absence of these characteristics amongst other societies, placing the Roman people at the apex of civilisation. Indeed in a world dominated by Roman political and cultural standards, this potent imagery contained fundamental ideas regarding the hierarchy of peoples and the place of conquered groups in the *pax Romana*.[8] The superiority of 'Romanness' and Rome's place at the apex of civilization was vindicated to Roman audiences. These men and woman understood implicitly the natural order of the cosmos and their place at its head, which was explained by Rome's meteoric rise and her domination of the Mediterranean and temperate Europe.[9]

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[8] A. N. Sherwin-White, *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 1-61; B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, 2004), pp. 83-109; A. Erskine, *Roman Imperialism* (Edinburgh, 2010), pp. 39-47; Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity*, pp. 3-42.

[9] Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, pp. 55-168. Ammianus Marcellinus, a 'Greek' from Antioch, for example, claimed that Rome was revered and admired throughout the world: *Res Gestae*, 14.6.3-6.

The subjugation of distant peoples was thus justified and legitimised through imperialistic ethnographic discourse; groups such as the *Galli*, *Germani* and *Britanni* targeted by an expansionist imperial regime were presented as quintessentially hostile to Rome: distant yet threatening, exotic yet reprehensible. These rhetorical constructs – the creation of the 'Other' – are now recognised as key facets of the colonial experience and rationalisation/justification of imperial rule.[10] The 'Othering' of colonised peoples by the educated classes of the politically and culturally dominant imperial power, ancient or modern, was a literary endeavour which emphasised contradistinctions between perceived norms, working to simultaneously de-humanise and sensationalise the characteristics of individuals and communities beyond the confines of accepted normalities. Rome thus conceived societies on her periphery as 'Other', a threat to the structured and logical Roman world providing the justification for imperial expansion as a self-defensive 'civilising mission'.[11] Roman society thus exhibited a profound sense of prejudice towards particular groups; however, this was not bigotry based upon skin pigmentation but rather an assessment based upon distinctions between civility and barbarism and the dynamic between centre (Rome) and periphery (*barbaricum*).[12]

Ethnography might conversely be used to highlight the worthlessness of barbarian territory as a prospect for conquest; but whatever an individual author's attitude, these images were powerful constructs which were disseminated throughout the empire and circulated amongst the literate and illiterate through various mediums such as literature, sculpture and coinage. As a contrast with which to define Rome and the Romans *barbaricum* and the

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[10] E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978). For the application of Said's approach to the Roman world, see R. M. Schneider, 'Friend *and* Foe: the Orient in Rome', in V. Sarkhosh and S. Stewart (eds.), *The Age of the Parthians* (London, 2010), pp. 50-87.

[11] Erskine, *Roman Imperialism*, pp. 36-9. This reasoning is apparent in Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, I.1-15; for Caesar's application of this rationale to the British invasion see below.

[12] Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, pp. 502-16; Sherwin-White, *Racial Prejudice*, pp. 56-61.

barbarians were fundamental to the construction of Roman imperial identity; indeed, the

Roman state could not have functioned without an innate sense of hostility, fear and wonder

for the 'unknown' peoples occupying the uncharted lands at and beyond the limits of the

known world.[13] What complicated the situation was the cultural conservatism of the Roman

empire, which cherished the possession of a literate education for the upper echelons of

society. Indeed, as we shall see, Roman writers of the later empire were very much the

descendants of their intellectual forbears of the late republican/early imperial period,

preserving and reworking ethnographic knowledge for the sake of genre and style. This of

course had profound implications for the manner in which provincialized societies were

depicted and portrayed within the empire. It is this matter which stands at the heart of

ethnographic Britishness, and to these depictions of the Britons we turn now.

Julius Caesar

While Greek travellers and traders had had limited contact with the island and its inhabitants

and some early Roman authors had referred to Britain,[14] Julius Caesar's British incursions in

55 and 53 B.C. created the circumstances under which the habits and customs of the Britons,

as perceived first-hand by a Roman author, were first presented to Roman audiences.

Probably written in the winter of 52-1 B.C., Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* (*BG*) was an account

of Caesar's victorious subjugation of Gaul and his struggle with the Gallic leader

Vercingetorix, culminating with the siege and destruction of Alesia. Divided originally into

seven books, with an eighth added by Caesar's friend Aulus Hirtius, *BG* in part represents an

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[13] A. Alfoldi, 'The Moral Frontier on the Rhine and Danube', *The Congress of Roman Frontier Studies*, ed. E. Birley (Durham, 1952), pp. 1-16; J. F. Drinkwater, 'The "Germanic threat on the Rhine Frontier": a Romano-Gallic artefact?', in R. W. Mathisen and H. Sivan (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 20-30; H. Teitler, '*Visa vel lecta?* Ammianus on Persia and the Persians', in J. W. Drijvers and D. Hunt (eds.), *The Late Roman World and its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus* (London, 1999), pp. 216-223.

[14] Stewart, 'Inventing Britain', 2.

attempt by the author to justify his own expansionist agenda, supposedly undertaken for the greater glory of Rome. As such, Caesar contrived to present his campaigns as defensive measures designed to protect Rome and her allies from barbarian attack; the protection of the Province against the migration of the Helvetii providing the pretext for the subsequent conquest of Gaul.[15] This rather dubious pretext provided a convenient trope explaining the devastation and subjugation of the many Gallic peoples and also 'justified' the British incursions: the Britons had brought war on themselves by assisting the Gauls and delaying the transfer of hostages.[16]

For Caesar, the Gauls were a *natio*, 'nation', a term signifying the notion of a biologically-linked entity comprised of regional subgroupings, known as *civitates*, with their own identities and leadership. *Civitas* is often problematically translated as 'tribe', perhaps suggesting to modern audiences a greater degree of barbarity and disorganisation than ancient authors meant to convey. Caesar perceived Gallic society as hierarchical, comprised of two *genus* or 'classes' of men, *equites* and *principes*, and the Druids.[17] Most significantly, Caesar detailed the geographic extent of Gaul, noting the Rhine as the demarcation point between *Galli* and *Germani*. This was his own rationalisation of what had become imperial space and thus his account of Gallic *mores*, confined by the Rhine, compared these attributes with those of the *Germani*. Description of barbarian societies was an integral part of conquest narrative and Caesar's descriptions of these two ethnic groups differed in crucial ways. For example, whilst the Gauls indulged in such barbaric customs as the sacrifice of condemned men, guilty or otherwise, in huge flaming wicker-works and had only recently ceased from sacrificing slaves and retainers at the funerals of noblemen, their world was one of structure and

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[15] *BG*, 1.1-20. See J. F. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul. The Three Provinces, 58BC – AD260* (London, 1993), pp. 19-20.

[16] *BG*, 4.20.

[17] *BG*, 6.11.

sophistication where society was ordered and run through the Druidic priesthood and the public administration of the magistracy.[18] It was a society in which education, learning and philosophical discussion were highly prized.[19] There was some sign of civilization here. Caesar's campaigns had brought the Gauls within the bounds of Roman knowledge.

In comparison the world beyond the Rhine was *barbaricum*. True, the *Germani* were a *natio*, comprised of *civitates* with political authority wielded by *magistri* and *principes*.[20] Yet Caesar's depiction of Germanic society confirmed the *Germani* as barbarians: most notably the *Germani agri culturae non student*, 'do not give attention to agriculture', but were pastoralists living off meat, cheese and milk. The absence of a Druidic caste for the formal interpretation of the divine meant that the *Germani* were also illogical and dysfunctional in their unstructured worship of the gods, which entailed veneration of the Sun and Moon. However despite covering themselves in skins, another characteristic barbarian trait, the *Germani*, although somewhat innocent were not sexually licentious.[21] While recounting their barbaric traits, Caesar also expresses admiration for Germanic hospitality:

> *...qui quacumque de causa ad eos venerunt, ab inuria prohibent sanctosque habent, hisque omnium domus patent, victusque communicatur.*[22]

> All those that come to them for whatever cause, they hold sacred and protect from injury, here all homes are open and provisions are shared.

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[18] *BG*, 6.11-20. Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians*, pp. 87-8.

[19] *BG*, 6.14.

[20] *BG*, 6.22.

[21] *BG*, 6.21.

[22] *BG*, 6.23. (My translation)

Caesar's respect moreover was extended to the *Germani*'s fighting ability, which although based solely upon a desire for plunder and fame, nonetheless stood testament to the strength and vigour of the *Germani*:

> *…latrocinia nullam habent infamiam, quae extra fines cuiusque civitatis fiunt, atque ea iuventutis exercendae ac desidiae minuendae causa fieri praedicant.*[23]

> …to the robberies which the states are making beyond their boundaries, they hold no dishonour, saying they served to keep the youths busy and lessen inactivity.

Despite referring to the war-like activities of the *Germani* as *latrocinium* 'robbery', Caesar may have been suggesting that Roman society required a similar outlet for the energies of its young men, exemplified by his extended sojourn in Gaul, in order that the republic might sustain its vitality. Whatever his motivations, Caesar's treatment of the *Germani* suggested to his readership that the *natio* beyond the Rhine were vigorous barbarians, organised for war; the placement of this ethnographic digression and its accompanying description of the inhospitable Germanic woodlands prior to the account of Caesar's campaign across the Rhine reinforcing the essential nature of this concept to the 'conquest narrative'. Caesar's construct of the *Germani* thus brought this *natio* onto the bounds of both physical and cognitive imperial knowledge and power; a threatening *natio* now dwelt at the *terminus* of the known world and it would be up to future generation to resolve this matter.

According to Caesar, the crossing of the Rhine was as an heroic achievement, one which merited recognition for entering the unexplored world of *barbaricum*. To enter Britain was an even greater accomplishment for to do so Caesar had to set upon *Oceanus*, the ancient

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[23] *BG*, 6.23.

boundary that formed the limits of the earth.[24] The Ocean provided both a physical and

psychological barrier to the extension of empire. Its crossing subsequently took on epic

proportions, accentuating the achievements of those Romans who dared to cross and confront

the barbarians dwelling on the further shores. According to Roman mentalities therefore, the

Britons, a mysterious people dwelling in an island located in the Outer Ocean, were logically

classified as barbarians. Caesar indeed represents Britain as an unknown entity located in the

Outer Ocean. Remarking how a visit to the island might be of 'great advantage to us' (*magno*

sibi usui), Caesar relates how the Gauls knew virtually nothing regarding Britain, its harbours

or its inhabitants, and that questioning of the traders could equally reveal very little.[25]

Woolf has argued that ethnographic and geographic knowledge was acquired on the

'middle ground' through the interaction of Romans and the local populations, including both

elites and traders.[26] However in Caesar's case what we may be witnessing is the deliberate

suppression of 'middle ground' knowledge for the sake of narrative, as earlier in his account

Caesar relates a significant amount of information suggesting that knowledge of Britain

would have been plentiful. For example, part of southern Britain had been ruled by

Diviciacus, king of the Suessiones;[27] the Veneti, the most powerful coastal tribe in Gaul,

conducted trade with Britain;[28] British warriors had been aiding the Gauls' resistance to

Caesar;[29] and, perhaps most significantly, Commius, the king of the Atrebates, a people

occupying parts of northeast Gaul and southern Britain who was 'held in the greatest of

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[24] J. S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 9-41.

[25] *BG*, 4.20.

[26] Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians*, pp. 8-31, 80-88; G. Woolf, 'Cruptorix and his kind. Talking ethnicity on the middle ground', in T. Derks and N. Roymans (eds.), *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity: The Role of Power and Tradition* (Amsterdam, 2009), pp. 207-18.

[27] *BG*, 2.4.14.

[28] *BG*, 3.8.

[29] *BG*, 3.9.

respect in those regions' (*in his regionibus magni habebatur*) was sent to the island as Caesar's personal envoy.[30] At a personal level, then, Caesar communicated with people in possession of first-hand knowledge concerning Britain; yet to heighten his achievements Caesar presented his entry into Britain as a leap into the unknown.

Caesar knew the island as *Britannia* and her inhabitants as *Britanni*; however, during his narrative of the first invasion Caesar refers to the Britons as *barbari*, 'barbarians', a term applied to other peoples whom clashed with the Romans including the Germanic Ubii and Suebi and Belgic Morini.[31] *Barbarus* did not signify just possession of uncivilized traits but was deployed in association with groups who were, or recently had been, participating in hostile action against Caesar. Caesar in fact praised the Britons for the combined fighting ability of the charioteers and warriors whose skill and dexterity allowed them to engage and disengage with the enemy at close quarters. This, however, is unsurprising, for it reinforced the heroic achievements made by Caesar and his men in even landing in the island.[32] Ethnographic digression thus projected to Roman audiences at the heart of empire an image of the Britons simultaneously exotic and alluring, a fascinating image of a barbaric and hostile people lurking ominously beyond Rome's boundaries:

> *Ex iis omnibus longe sunt humanissmi, qui Cantium incolunt, quae regio est*
> *maritima omnis, neque multum a Gallica differunt consuetudine. Interiores*
> *plerique frumenta non serunt, sed lacte et carne vivunt pellibusque sunt vestiti.*
> *Omnes vero se Britanni vitro inficiunt, quod caeruleum efficit colorem, atque hoc*
> *horribiliores sunt in pugna aspectu. Capilloque sunt promisso atque omni parte*
> *corporis rasa praeter caput et labrum superius. uxores habent deni duodenique*

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[30] *BG*, 4.21.

[31] *BG*, 4.24; 6.29; 4.22.

[32] *BG*, 4.33.

inter se communes et maxime fratres cum fratibus parentesque cum liberis sed qui

sunt ex iis nati, eorum habentur liberi, quo primum virgo quaeque deducta est. [33]

From all the ones mentioned, by far the most civilised are those dwelling in

Cantium, an entirely maritime region, whose customs do not greatly differ from

the Gauls. In the interior, very many do not sow corn but live on milk and meat,

and are clothed with skins. All true Britons dye themselves with woad, which

produces a blue colour; they are dreadful to behold in battle. They shave all parts

of the body, except the head and upper lip which grows long. Wives they hold in

common between themselves, often shared between groups of ten or twelve men

and especially between brothers and fathers and sons; but those born from these

unions are usually held as the children of the man by whom she was first taken as a

virgin.

For Caesar, the inhabitants of Cantium were *humanissmi*, 'most civilized', in large part due to

their proximity to Gallic society and therefore Roman influence. Rather, it was the unknown,

interior part of Britain – the 'heart of darkness' as it were – which represented the most

barbaric part of the island; the ever-decreasing spheres of civility inhabited by the Britons

worsening the further one ventured from the coast, and by implication from Rome. Proven by

the region's inhabitants reliance upon pastoralism and typified by the wearing of animal skins

and the consumption of milk and meat to the neglect of agriculture, a trait shared with the

Germani, these minor indiscretions were compounded by that most horrific characteristic of

barbarian behaviour: sexual depravity. Hence the knowledge that the Britons shared wives in

common was a particularly useful topos in accentuating their barbarity to Roman society;

indeed, these Britons were perhaps more degenerate in Caesar's eyes than the *Germani*, who

were not accused of sexual misdemeanours. More fabulous to Roman audiences would have

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[33] *BG*, 5.14. (My translation)

been Caesar's reference to the Britons' habit of painting themselves with woad. This appears to have been a direct observation; hence the dreadfulness of the Britons' appearance in battle, suggesting those *civitates* whom Caesar encountered participated in this cultural practice. The longevity of this custom within Brittonic society is a matter which will concern us elsewhere.

Reference to the 'most civilized' inhabitants of Cantium and their also proximity to Gaul introduces furthermore the concept of different types of Britons. Within Britain indeed contradistinction existed between the peoples of the interior and exterior, between 'indigenous' and 'immigrant' Britons:

> *Britanniae pars interior ab iis incolitur, quos natos in insula ipsi memoria*
> *proditum dicunt, maritime pars ab iis, qui praedae ac belli inferendi causa ex*
> *Belgio transierant – qui omnes fere iis nominibus civitatum appellantur, quibus*
> *orti ex civitatibus eo pervenerunt – et bello inlato ibi remanserunt atque agros*
> *colere coeperunt.*[34]

> The interior part of Britain is inhabited by those who say, from memory, they were
> born in the island; the maritime part, by those who passed over the water from
> Belgae for the cause of plunder and war – nearly all of whom are called by the
> names of the states from which they descended – and having brought war there,
> remained and began to cultivate the land.

Here, the implication is that those inhabitants indigenous to the island were in some sense inferior to the Belgic and other coastal immigrants, whose agricultural sophistication was the result of their external origins. It is interesting nonetheless that, to Caesar at any rate, distinctions between Britannic groups on the basis of their origins were part of insular identities. Discrepancies between the island's populations make it doubtful that at this date an

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[34] *BG*, 5.12. (My translation)

overarching Britannic identity prevailed with any force within Britain. Caesar and his audience, then, understood the Britons to be barbarians: their sexual depravity, lack of agricultural sophistication and hostility to the Roman *pax* provided clear evidence of this truism. While Caesar's incursions into the coastal regions had uncovered some signs of (limited) sophistication, his narrative implied that the barbaric customs that defined Britishness were situated within the interior of the island, out of reach of Roman arms and her civilizing influence. Britishness was an elusive construct. Caesar's depiction of the Britons thus formed the basis of Roman knowledge of Britain and the Britons. In particular, later generations of Roman authors took on his depiction of Britishness and, under the changing circumstances of imperial expansion within Britain, relocated 'Britishness' in the northern reaches of the island.

Hostile *Gens*

In the period prior to the Claudian annexation of Britain in A.D. 43, the notion that the Britons were a hostile *gens* capable of destabilising Roman civilisation became embedded within imperial rhetoric; disseminated through imperial court poetry this image of the Britons thus encapsulated the world-view of the emperor and the imperial elite, as expressed in Horace's composition praising the emperor Augustus:

> *hic bellum lacrimosum, hic miseram famem pestemque a populo et principe*
>
> *Caesare in Persas atque Britannos vestra motus aget prece.*[35]

> Moved by your prayer, he will drive away mournful warfare, he will drive away
> wretched famine and plague from our people and Caesar, our leader, and direct
> them against the Persians and Britons.

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[35] Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. and trans. N. Rudd (Cambridge Mass., 2004), Odes 1.21.

According to Horace, the Britons and Persians represented the gravest threat to imperial prosperity, and it was the emperor's personal duty to steer nature's afflictions towards these foes. Imperial territory was depicted as being surrounded by *barbaricum*, the unorganised regions of the earth populated by barbarian peoples hostile to Rome:

> *Terrarum dea gentiumque Roma, cui par est nihil secundum,*
>
> *Traiani modo laeta cum futuros tot per saecula computaret annos Et fortem iuvenemque Martiumque in tanto duce militum videret,*
>
> *Dixit praeside gloriosa tali:'Parthorum procure ducesque Serum, Thraces, Sauromatae, Getae, Britanni, possum ostendere Caesarem; venite.*[36]
>
> When Rome, goddess of lands and peoples, to whom there is no equal and no second, was joyfully reckoning Trajan's future years through so many generations, and saw in so great a Leader a soldier, brave and young and martial, proud of such a ruler she spoke: "Nobles of Parthia and Chieftains of the Seres, ye Thracians, Sarmatians, Getans, Britons, I can show you a Caesar: come."

Composed by Martial, a provincialized Spaniard, during the reign of Trajan (98-117) around sixty years after the Claudian conquest of southern Britain, this poem positions Trajan against the *gentes* which encircle the Roman world, including the Britons, Sarmatians and Getae. The poem's tone is triumphant: Trajan was a Caesar to inspire dread in his enemies. There are signs here nonetheless that Roman authors constructed a 'siege-mentality' which justified 'defensive' military expansion in order to secure Roman prosperity. Britons and Parthians were therefore aligned as the twin representations of the empire's western and eastern extremities – indeed, these *gentes* occupied another world, *alius orbis* or *orbis alter*.[37] Plans

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[36] Martial, *Epigrams*, ed. and trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey, 3 vols., (Cambridge Mass., 1993), 3.12.8

[37] Schneider, 'Friend *and* Foe', p. 60.

to subdue such a threat were an achievement in itself, as Horace's prayers for Augustus'

safety make plain:

serves iturum Caesarem in ultimos orbis Britannos,

protect Caesar as he marches to Britain at the edge of the earth.[38]

From the very outset of the principate therefore, the Britons and Parthians represented the

twin threat to the empire. In reality, the differences between the two societies could not have

been greater. As an extensive empire that rivalled Roman domination of the eastern

Mediterranean and the Middle East, the Parthian (later, Persian) empire can be justifiably

described as an ancient superpower.[39] Certainly the Parthians had succeeded in killing

prominent Romans such as Crassus, who had launched an unprovoked and highly

unsuccessful attack resulting in the loss of the standards at the Battle of Carrhae (53B.C.).

However, although Rome had met defeat in the east, victory was also found there; between

113-116, for example, Trajan had launched a series of campaigns that resulted in the capture

of the Parthian capital Ctesiphon, his assumption of the title *Parthicus* 'conqueror of the

Parthians' and the issue of coins bearing the relief *Parthia Capta*.[40] As a consequence,

Roman ambitions and anxieties were fixed on its eastern boundaries, with animosity between

the pair persisting throughout antiquity.[41]

Viewed in this light, the suggestion that the Britons posed a similar threat to Roman

imperialism appears faintly ridiculous. For while Caesar had reported that the Britons had

lent assistance to the Gauls during the Gallic wars, the Britons clearly did not have the

military or logistical capability, or still less the social and political cohesion, to launch a

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[38] Horace, *Odes*, 1.35.29-30.

[39] J. Wisehöfer, *Ancient Persia: From 550BC to 650 AD*, trans. A. Azodi (London, 2001), pp. 20-6.

[40] C. S. Lightfoot, 'Trajan's Parthian War and the fourth-century perspective', *JRS* 80 (1990), 115-26, at 115-21.

[41] See, for example, Ammianus' account of Julian's Persian campaign, *Res Gestae* 18.4.1-18.6.7.

sustained attack on the empire; indeed there was no 'Britannic Empire' organised for war that could have rivalled Rome's western domination. Nonetheless, the fallacy of the 'British threat' remained an integral piece of Roman propaganda throughout the Principate and into the Dominate, accentuated by the fact that the conquest was drawn-out and incomplete, never incorporating the entire island; with further imperial campaigns and a Wall required to contain the northern peoples.

The place of Britain in the Roman world is perhaps nowhere more clearly articulated than in imperial titulature. As emperors were commended for travelling to the ends of the earth, beyond the Ocean in their quest to subjugate imperial enemies, their achievements were celebrated through the acclamation of the title *Britannicus*, 'Victorious in Britain'. Claudius was of course the first emperor to receive this title, having been granted the honour in the aftermath of the campaign of A.D. 43; indeed, Claudius's son consequently became known as 'Britannicus'.[42] Around 184, Commodus assumed the title *Britannicus*, although this was supposedly mere flattery on the part of his companions, as the victory belonged to Ulpius Marcellus.[43] Septimius and Caracalla both received the accolade *Britannicus*.[44] Claudius aside, all other emperors were awarded *Britannicus* in recognition of imperial campaigns against Britain's northern barbarians, though how far Romans elsewhere in the empire were aware of the distinction between the barbaric and the provincial Britons is unclear. Other third-century imperial victory titles such as *Arabicus maximus*, *Dacius maximus*, *Germanicus maximus*, *Parthicus maximus*, *Persicus maximus* and *Sarmaticus maximus*,[45] may suggest a degree of ambiguity existed in terms of the status of Britain and

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[42] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 7, 20.1-2.

[43] *HA*, 'Life of Commodus', 8.4; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Epit. 73.8.1-2.

[44] *HA*, 'Life of Septimius Severus', 18.2.

[45] M. Peachin, *Roman Imperial Titulature and Chronology, A.D. 235-284* (Amsterdam, 1990), pp. 65, 86-7, 91-2, 96.

the Britons. Indeed, this list recalls the familiar first-century image of a Roman world ringed by hostile *gentes*; situated alongside these titles, *Britannicus* perpetuated the imagery of a hostile Britain, populated by warlike enemies of the state.

Tacitus

Poetry performed for the court and imperial titulature thus maintained the notion that the Britons were a hostile *gens*. However, it is in the *Agricola* of Tacitus that we next encounter a detailed construction of Britishness. Most significantly, we find that Caesarean Britishness, which had lurked within the interior of the island, has been relocated to Britain's furthest reaches. Tacitus was a provincial Roman from Gallia Narbonensis, probably the son of an *eques* and procurator of *Gallia Belgica*.[46] Thoroughly Roman in attitudes and cultural affinity, Tacitus wrote the *Agricola* around AD 98 as a *vita* commemorating the achievements of his father-in-law, the former governor of Britain and eponymous figure of the work, Julius Agricola. As is to be expected, Agricola's merits, notably his *prudentia, moderatio* and unsurpassed military skill are emphasised throughout the work.[47] This *vita* was not just a commentary on Julius Agricola but an indictment of Roman society at large. and thus within *Agricola* Tacitus utilises the Britons as a mirror with which to criticise Roman failings, in particular the recently deceased Domitian's suppression of *virtus* and *eloquentia*.[48]

Tacitus adhered to the established usage and referred to the island as *Britannia* and its inhabitants as *Britanni*; collectively as *natio* or *populus*.[49] Below this ethnic descriptor Tacitus refers by name to a mere handful of regional groupings: the Ordovices, Silures,

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[46] Tacitus, *De Vita Agricola*, eds. R. M. Ogilvie and I. Richmond, (Oxford, 1967), p. 7.

[47] A. R. Birley, 'The *Agricola*', in A. J. Woodman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 47-58, at pp. 47-50.

[48] Clarke, 'An island nation', 98-102.

[49] *Agricola*, 10.1, 12.1.

Brigantes, and the otherwise unknown Boresti, although he does comment on their appearance and possible origins:

> *Ceterum Britaniam qui mortalis initio coluerint indigenae an advecti ut inter barbaros parum compertum. Habitus corporum varii atque ex eo argumentia. Namque rutilae Caledoniam habitantium comae magni artus Germanicam originem adseveran; Silurum colorati vultus torti plerumque crines et posita contra Hispania Hiberos veteres traiecisse easque sedes occupasse fidem faciunt ; proximi Gallis et similes sunt seu durante originis vi seu procurrentibus in diversa terris positio caeli corporibus habitum dedit. In universam tamen aestimanti Gallos vicinam insulam occupasse credible est.*

> As to what humans initially inhabited Britain, whether indigenous or incomer, little has been established, as is usually the case with barbarians. Their physical appearance is varied and allows arguments to be made. For example, in the case of the inhabitants of Caledonia, their red-gold hair and massive limbs proclaim German origin. As for the Silures, their swarthy features and, in most cases, curly hair, and the fact that Spain lies opposite, provide evidence that Iberians of old crossed over and settled this territory. Those nearest the Gauls also resemble that people. Either their common origins still has some effect or, since the two lands converge from opposite directions, shared climatic conditions produce the same physical appearance. [50]

Tacitus' observations on the various regional populations' distinct origins and appearances provide an original insight into the perceived biological and physiological connections between barbarian peoples during antiquity. The Britons, then, were part of a larger matrix of barbarian peoples, possibly connected through shared descent or geographical proximity. As

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[50] *Agricola*, 11.

for their customs, in a later passage Tacitus offers a vision of British society which differs somewhat from Caesar's account. Now, the interior of the island is a land abundant in crops where the Britons are not lacking in agricultural sophistication. Gone, too, is reference to the Britons' sexual misdemeanours; indeed, whilst Boudicca's assumption of military leadership was regarded as the subversion of feminine and masculine roles, Tacitus does not link this to sexual depravity, as one might expect.[51]

Tacitus describes regional groupings, in general, in one of two ways: *civitates* or *gentes*. *Civitates* (s. *civitas*) can be translated as 'states'. It appears to denote for Tacitus pacified and incorporated provincial communities, familiar to the Roman authorities and dwelling under their control, as suggested in the grant to the British client king, Cogidumnus: *quaedam civitates Cogidumno regi donatae*, 'certain states were gifted to king Cogidumnus'.[52] It is noteworthy that two of the named regional groups, the Ordovices and Brigantes, described as *civitates* appear in Tacitus' narrative as having once been serious threats to Roman imperialism. The Brigantes, for example, had formerly provided stiff opposition for Petilius Cerialis: *multa proelia, et aliquando non incruenta*, 'there were many battles, and sometimes not without bloodshed.'[53] The Ordovices had similarly caused difficulty amongst the occupying forces prior to Agricola's arrival:

> *Ordovicum civitas haud multo ante adventum eius alam in finibus suis agentem*
>
> *prope universam obtriverat, eoque initio erecta provincia.*[54]

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[51] *Agricola*, 16.1.

[52] *Agricola*, 14.1.

[53] *Agricola*, 17.1.

[54] *Agricola*, 18.1.

> The state of the Ordovices, not long before his coming, had crushed nearly all a
> wing of cavalry plundering in its territory, and this initial stroke had raised up the
> province.

These passages were presumably intended to convey the seriousness of the political situation prior to Agricola's governorship. Indeed, Agricola launched a campaign against the Ordovices which finally saw their subjugation: the Ordovician and Brigantian threat was a thing of the past, both were now *civitates*. Tacitus could on the other hand use *gens* to denote hostile British peoples, such as in his description of Julius Frontius, who:

> *validamque et pugnacem Silurum gentem armis subegit*,

> subdued by warfare the strong and warlike *gens* of the Silures.[55]

This usage might raise questions over the subjugation of the Silures or rather Tacitus' depiction of Frontius as a successful governor. Greater clarity might be seen in further deployment of this term, such as during Agricola's campaigns in the north, which took Roman armies into hitherto unexplored lands:

> *Tertius expeditionum annus novas gentes aperuit, vastatis usque ad Taum*
> *(aestuario nomen est) nationibus.*[56]

> The third year of campaigning revealed new *gentes*, having desolated the *nationes*
> all the way to the Tay (the name of the estuary).

Here the exposure of new peoples presumably was intended as a contrast with the familiar *civitates* already under Roman dominion, as suggested by the following passage:

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[55] *Agricola*, 17.2.

[56] *Agricola*, 22.1.

> *Quinto expeditionum anno nave prima transgressus ignotas ad id tempus gentes*
>
> *crebris simul ac prosperis proeliis domuit.*[57]

> In the fifth year of campaigns, he crossed with the first ship and subdued peoples
>
> up to that time unknown together by a repeated series of successful battles.

Indeed, Tacitus explicitly draws this distinction in the following chapter (§23), by contrasting the groups conquered and made familiar to the Romans (although no names are provided) around the Forth with those still awaiting Agricola further north:

> *Ceterum aestate, qua sextum officii annum incohabet, amplexus civitates trans*
>
> *Bodotriam sitas, quia motus universarun ultra gentium et infesta hostili exercitus*
>
> *itinera timebantur, portus classe exploravit.*[58]

> To resume the story, by the summer where he was beginning his sixth year of
>
> service, having encircled the *civitates* situated across the Forth because there were
>
> fears that all of the *gentes* beyond had been stirring and the routes were disturbed
>
> by the enemy army, he searched out harbours with the fleet.

For Tacitus, Agricola's triumphant progression towards the Forth had turned the local groups from unconquered *gentes* to pacified *civitates*. Lack of knowledge perhaps did not hinder Tacitus' naming of these regional populations within northern Britain, but rather their irrelevance to his narrative as conquered *civitates*. Whereas in later periods, *gens* took on greater emphasis as a high-level ethnic descriptor it was not used in this sense by Tacitus; rather this was an equivalent term to *civitas* describing a regional group within the wider *populus* or *natio*. On a broader level, the division between pacified and hostile is further emphasised by Tacitus' claims that a frontier had been identified within northern Britain:

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[57] *Agricola*, 24.1.

[58] *Agricola*, 25.1.

> *Quarta aestas obtinendis quae percucurrerat insumpta; ac si virtus exercituum et Romani nominis gloria pateretur, inventus in ipsa Britannia terminus. Namque Clota et Bodotria diversi maris aestibus per inmensum revectae, angusto terrarum spatio dirimuntur: quod tum praesidiis firmabatur atque omnis propior sinus tenebatur, summotis velut in aliam insulam hostibus.*

> The fourth summer was spent in securing what he had overrun. And, if the spirit of the army and the glory of the Roman name had permitted it, a frontier had been found within Britain itself. For the Firths of Clyde and Forth, carried far inland by the tides of opposite seas, are separated by a narrow neck of land. This was now securely held by garrisons and the whole country on the nearer side was secured: the enemy had been pushed back, as if into a different island.[59]

The key word here is *terminus*; this was a time-honoured Roman concept, indeed a religious value, which separated the military and civilian spheres and denoted the limits of organised Roman territory, but not their power or influence.[60] For educated Roman audiences, particularly those who shared a vision of an all-dominant empire, Tacitus' use of *terminus* would have relayed the information that organised territory in Roman Britain extended to the Firths of Clyde and Forth – and beyond that 'another island', home to the Britons of Caledonia. Later in the Roman period, the Caledonii were a people or *gens*; however, Caledonia for Tacitus was geographic descriptor of the 'island' beyond the Forth-Clyde isthmus. Hence the people of this *insula* are *Britanni*, 'the Britons'; *Caledoniam habitantium*, 'the inhabitants of Caledonia'; or the *Caledoniam incolentes populi*, 'the population who dwell in Caledonia'.[61] The people who inhabited were in fact *nobilissimi totius Britanniae*,

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[59] *Agricola*, 23.

[60] Whittaker, *Frontiers*, pp. 23-4.

[61] *Agricola*, 11.2; 15.3.

'the most noble of all Britain'.[62] However, the Britons of Caledonia were nonetheless barbarians and displayed characteristic traits, such as their response to the speech made by the British leader Calgacus to his assembled army:

> *Excepere orationem alacres, ut barbaris moris, fremitu cantuque et clamoribus dissonis.*[63]

> They welcomed the speech with excitement, in the custom of barbarians, with roaring, singing and discordant shouts.

The stereotypical description of barbaric *mores* and indeed the classification of the Britons at this point as barbarians should be viewed as a careful choice by Tacitus. *Barbari/barbarus* was, as we have seen, a term used by Caesar when recounting the violent actions of Roman enemies, Britons and others. Tacitus applies the same strictures. Those Britons under Boudicca's leadership engaged in a rebellion against Rome were *barbari*.[64] Thus Calgacus and his Britons, about to engage in conflict with a Roman army were also *barbari*. Caledonia was, for Tacitus and his audience, the dwelling-place of the noblest Britons and while these *Britanni* might be considered *barbari* they were nonetheless symbolic of a wider sense of Britishness. In this Tacitean paradigm we have the beginnings of the construct which would persist into late antiquity: the inextricable association between Caledonia and the Caledonii as representative of Britain and the *Britanni*.

It was, however, problematic that the same ethnic descriptor, *Britanni*, could be used to describe both provincials and barbarians; the inhabitants of the empire and the population of *barbaricum*. More problematic was the general situation that provincialized populations were of limited, if any interest, to Roman authors following their incorporation. Tacitus does

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[62] *Agricola*, 30.2.

[63] *Agricola*, 33.1

[64] *Agricola*, 16.1.

however offer an insight into this process, in his claim that the Britons of the province had descended rapidly into anonymity under the influence of Agricola's patronage, notably through their assumption of Roman language (*abnuebant romanam linguam*) and dress (*frequens toga*).[65] Though the Britons welcomed these innovations, for Tacitus this merely *par servitutis esset* 'part of their servitude'.[66] There were in fact for Tacitus two types of Briton, the conquered and unconquered:

> *...in deposcendis periculis eadem audacia et, ubi advenere, in detrectandis eadem formido. plus tamen ferociae Britanni praeferunt, ut quos nondum longa pax emollierit. nam Gallos quoque in bellis floruisse accepimus mox segnitia cum otio intravit amissa virtute pariter ac libertate. quod Britannorum olim victis evenit: ceteri manent quales Galli fuerunt.*[67]

> …likewise the same valour in demanding danger and, when it comes, the same fearfulness in facing it. Still, the Britons display more fierceness, not having been made soft by prolonged peace. We are told, indeed, that the Gauls, as well, used to be warriors of repute. Then decadence set in, hand in hand with peace: their courage has been lost along with their liberty. The same has happened to the Britons long since conquered. The rest are still like the Gauls once were.

The distinction implied by Tacitus between free Britons and conquered is an important contrast running throughout *Agricola*. Prolonged peace and loss of liberty had, then, even in Tacitus' day not overcome all *Britanni*. While the more ferocious might still show cowardice at the onset of danger these were to be contrasted with those groups long-subject to Rome, who had accepted the toga and Latin speech. Tacitus thus adapted Caesar's equation between

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[65] *Agricola*, 11.2.

[66] *Agricola*, 11.2.

[67] *Agricola*, 11.3-4.

the relative civility of the outer Britons and their proximity to Gaul into a condemnation of conquered British society:

> *Ipsi Britanni dilectum ac tributa et iniuncta imperii munia impigre obeunt, si iniurise absint has aegre tolerant, iam domiti ut pareant, nondum ut serviant.*[68]

> The Britons themselves submit readily to conscription and taxes and the obligations imposed by the empire, so long as there are no abuses. These they are not willing to tolerate: they now have been broken into obedience, but not yet slavery.

The Britons depending on their relationship to the Roman empire could display a range of characteristics: the free display boldness (*audacia*) and fierceness (*saevitia*); the conquered submit into obedience (*obeo*). The very combination of these somewhat contradictory characteristics illustrated to Tacitus' audience the felicitousness of the Britons and the unstable nature of their existence: it was the Roman mission to bring stability to the chaotic lives of the Britons. However, the ethnographically visible Britons – that is, the inhabitants of Caledonia – are those beyond the imperial pale, and this *populus* retained its valour and sense of identity.

Tacitus' claim that a *terminus* existed on the Forth-Clyde line, beyond which lay 'another island' has connotations for all regional populations dwelling up to this point, not just the provincialized communities dwelling in southern Britain. Indeed, the peoples below the Forth-Clyde *terminus* were according to Tacitus *civitates* and this has great significance for what might be later classified as the intramural peoples.[69] Other than in Ptolemy's *Geographia*, which lists the Novantae, Selgovae, Damnonii and Votadini, the intramural

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[68] *Agricola*, 13.1.

[69] The use of this term for describing the peoples of northern England and the southern Scottish uplands prior to the late 2nd century is of course prefiguring the later situation; it is retained for convenience.

peoples are not referred to by name in Roman sources.[70] Tacitus presumably ignored these groups because he located the empire's *terminus* on the Forth, regardless of whether or not this was a meaningful 'barrier' of any sort to local populations. Provincial groups were simply of no interest to Roman authors, the internal dynamics of these societies ignored in the recounting of imperial deeds and frontier troubles. From a Tacitean perspective, then, there simply was no difference between the 'intramural' peoples and prominent lowland *civitates* such as the Catuvellauni and Corieltauvi of central-southern Britain. All had suffered at the hands of Tacitus a literary emasculation, ensuring they would drift quickly and quietly into obscurity, the victims of Roman cultural amnesia. The activities of later Roman writers and emperors cemented the literary irrelevance of the intramural peoples. The provincial Britons – that is, the communities who dwelt beneath the Forth-Clyde line – loss of their warlike nature and independent existence thus marked the beginning of an ethnographic process which saw the *civitates* descend into literary anonymity. In marked contrast, the peoples of the far north, the Caledonii, continued to exemplify the Britons in ethnographic literature, as we shall see.

Creating Roman Britain

Roman authors had much to say concerning the inhabitants of Britain. However, it is doubtful that an overarching Britannic 'national' identity existed amongst the island's regional communities prior to or even, perhaps, during the early period of the Roman conquest.[71]

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[70] Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, pp. 425, 455, 343-4, 508-9.

[71] K. J. Matthews, 'Britannus/Britto: Roman Ethnographies, Native Identities, Labels and Folk Devils', in *TRAC: The Third Conference Proceedings*, ed. A. Leslie (Glasgow, 1999), pp. 14-32, at p. 15; T. Ivleva, 'Remembering Britannia: Expressions of Identities by "Britons" on the Continent during the Roman Empire', in B. Alroth and C. Scheffer (eds.), *Attitudes towards the Past in Antiquity: Creating Identities*, Proceedings of an International Conference held at Stockholm University, 15-17 May 2009 (Stockholm, 2014), pp. 217-31, at pp. 225-8.

Recent work dealing with the ending of Roman Britain in fact questions the extent to which Britishness was adopted and retained by the provincial population in the Roman period. For instance, Stuart Laycock and Simon Esmonde Cleary have applied 'collapsed' or 'failed state' theory to the British situation, contending that provincial Britishness was a mere façade, a fragile construct which temporarily and ineffectually submerged the deeply-embedded 'tribal' identities of the various regional populations.[72] This supposed recession of fragile provincial Britishness is a variant of the views expounded by M. E. Jones and Richard Reece that 'de-romanization' typified fourth- and fifth-century Roman Britain.[73] Jones's views are particularly pertinent, as he argued that the provincial populations' absorption of their ambiguous and negative representation in the Roman sources led to a crisis of confidence amongst the Britons, precipitating their rejection of Roman culture.[74] However, while the Britons were viewed negatively in Roman ethnography, it is suggested below that this acted as a spur amongst the provincial communities, particularly the literate classes, in the post-Roman period exemplified by Gildas, who wished to distinguish themselves from the northern barbarians.

Regional identities were of paramount importance for the peoples of Roman Britain. Indeed, while Rome classified the inhabitants of *Britannia* as *Britanni*/*Brittanus*/*Britto*, it is thoroughly mistaken to suggest that Rome attempted to stifle regional identities and supplant them with a supranational British ethnic identity; on the contrary, regionality was encouraged as a method with which to engage the various population groups – the *civitates* – encountered in the course of the Roman expansion in Britain, as elsewhere.[75] We should therefore consider that British ethnic/provincial identity was an imperial construct. It was, however, a

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[72] Laycock, *Failed State*, pp. 154-68; Esmonde Cleary, 'Southern Britain', pp. 45-56.

[73] Jones, *End of Roman Britain*, pp. 139-42. Reece, 'Town and Country', 77-92.

[74] Jones, *End of Roman Britain*, pp. 154-5.

[75] See Ch. 5.

problematic one, for it referred to the provincial and barbarian population of the island. There was, nevertheless, a practical necessity for incorporating the conquered Britons into the provincial framework under the ethnonym *Britanni*.

As is clear from Caesar's definition of the Rhine as the boundary and demarcation point between Gaul and Germany,[76] the Romans preferred order; hence, Britishness was situated by Roman ethnographers within a bounded, geographically-determined context – the island of Britain – with this entity enclosed within a wider framework of Roman provinces. To the Romans, British identity was conferred through residency on the island. However, Britishness was likely to have been a weak, or indeed non-existent, concept prior to the Roman conquest,[77] with little, if any, affinity existing between regional populations on the basis of the ethnonym *Britanni*. To the island's inhabitants this may, indeed, have been an alien concept: Caesar himself had noted the discrepancy between the interior populations who regarded themselves as indigenous and the immigrant coastal populations; certainly the Narrow Sea seems to have been of little concern to these coastal groups, with peoples such as the Atrebates and Belgae perhaps thinking of themselves as connected through kinship to continental peoples of the same name.[78]

The incorporation of the island followed a pattern similar to imperial expansion elsewhere in temperate Europe. Subsequent to the Claudian annexation of A.D. 43, Britain was organised as a single province known as *Britannia*, extending by the 80s to the Gask Ridge.[79] *Provincia Britannia* was not simply an administrative necessity. Rather, the personification and deification of the island province established sacred boundaries which

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[76] *BG*, 1.1.

[77] James, *Atlantic Celts*, pp. 41-2; Matthews, 'Britannus/Britto', p. 16.

[78] *BG*, 2.4, 4.21; Tacitus; *Agricola*, 11.

[79] Salway, *Roman Britain*, p. 112; Hanson and Maxwell, *Rome's North West Frontier*, p. 44.

marked the Britons off as separate from the Gauls, Hiberni and any other surrounding *gens* or *natio* in a manner previously unknown. Place was to be a determining aspect of provincial identity. Inscriptions set up throughout the province in honour of the emperor, in recognition of imperial victories or commemorating (sometimes deceased) imperial officials refer to *provincia Britannia*.[80]

One such inscription from London personifies Britain and purports to come from the land itself: 'To the Deity of the Emperor the province of Britain (set this up).'[81] That the 'island cult' was an important deity amongst the epigraphically literate is suggested by an inscription set up by a freedman in York which honours *Britanniae Sanctae*, '[To] Holy Britain'.[82] 'Holy Britain', as with the other western provinces, was thus a female deity, as articulated clearly on an inscription from *Venta Belgarum*, Winchester, which evokes the spirits, respectively, of the Italian, German, Gallic and British mother goddesses.[83] Despite being a 'British' inscription, the British *mater* was placed behind her counterparts perhaps reflecting attitudes towards the island and its place in the Roman hierarchy: the dedicator, Antonius Lucretianus, *beneficiarius consularis*, probably envisioned the other mother goddesses, beginning with Italy, to have been of greater import.[84] In the north, an inscription from Jarrow praising Hadrian and commemorating the construction of the *vallum* refers to the dispersal of barbarians and the recovery of *provincia Britannia*.[85] Lastly, on the northernmost frontier, inscriptions from around the Antonine Wall at Auchendavy near Dumbarton and Castlehill refer, respectively, to *Genio Terrae Britannicae*, 'To the Genius of the Land of

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[80] *RIB*, 5, 8, 12.

[81] *RIB*, 5: *Num(ini) C[aes(aris) Aug(usti)] prou[incia] Brita[nnia]*

[82] *RIB*, 643.

[83] *RIB*, 88: *Matrib(us) Italis, Germanis, Gal(lis), Brit(annis), [A]ntonius [Lu]cretianus [b(ene)]f(iciarius) co(n)s(ularis) rest(ituit).*

[84] Cf. Claudian, *De Consulatu Stilichonis Liber Secundus*, 240-268: see Ch. 3.

[85] *RIB*, 1051.

Britain'[86] and the Goddess of *Britannia*,[87] again emphasising the sacred aspect of *Britannia* and her female designation.

The extent to which indigenous groups participated in the cult of the province is obscured by their disinclination to partake in the epigraphic habit.[88] Creating a sense of Britishness from the eclectic mix of indigenous populations, urban communities and (in origin, foreign) military garrisons of Roman Britain cannot then have been a simple task, both for the imperial authorities or the provincial themselves; particularly during the first and second centuries when Rome was attempting to pacify the island's peoples and lay the foundations of provincial government, while at the same time groups such as the Brigantes under Cartimandua were 'betraying' their fellow *Britanni* and, possibly, attacking other indigenous peoples.[89] That Britain was an island divided between *provincia* and *barbaricum* – itself pushed northward in the course of the Roman annexation – throughout its domination by Rome suggests that Britishness was a contested identity representing both the provincialized and un-provincialized.[90]

Despite ethnographic descriptions of the Britons, or perhaps because of them, generating a sense of provincial Britishness was essential for the successful integration of Britain into the empire; and indeed if a Britannic identity was to emerge amongst the regional populations of Roman Britain, it would take place in an imperial context. In the early imperial period, then, inscriptional evidence appears to converge with the Tacitean view by establishing that *provincia Britannia* – that is, the area conceived as organised Roman

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[86] *RIB*, 2175.

[87] *RIB*, 2195.

[88] See Ch. 5.

[89] For details, see Salway, *Roman Britain*, pp. 96-107.

[90] Suggested by in the invented speeches placed in the mouths of Calgacus and Boudicca by Tacitus, *Agricola*, 30-31, and Dio, *Roman History*, 9.62.2-7.

territory – extended from the south of the island, through York and the lands around the Wall before reaching a *terminus* on the Forth/Antonine Wall.[91] Paradoxically, however, Roman ethnographic tradition articulated first by Tacitus and reprised, as we shall see, by Dio, situated Britishness – that is the traits apparent to ethnographic observers that served to define the Britons – amongst the barbarian groups beyond the Forth.

Imperial cult was an additional mechanism which might have been used to induce a sense of British identity through encouraging 'tribal' solidarity at an intra-regional level. This process is exemplified in Gaul where the Altar of the Three Gauls, *Tres Galliae*, based at *Lugdunum*, Lyon, was inscribed with the names of the sixty Gallic peoples.[92] A similar effort to foster provincial loyalty in Britain might be seen at the establishment of an imperial cult at *Camulodunum*, Colchester, the *oppida* of Cunobelinus, ruler of the powerful southern confederacy based amongst the Trinovantes. Here, the appropriation of *Camulodunum* as an imperial cult centre was perhaps an attempt to reconfigure Cunobelinus' power into an expression of southern Britannic regional solidarity, clothed in imperial garb. This transition may not have been as dramatic as first appears, as southern kingships had utilised the symbols of *romanitas* and an association with the empire prior to the conquest.[93] That this process was contested, however, is indicated by the destruction of the imperial cult at Colchester during the Boudiccan revolt.[94]

Even if there was success in reconfiguring Cunobelinus' power, the sense of solidarity amongst the peoples of southern Britain may have been limited to those peoples previously under his overlordship; indeed, there is little reason to expect groups further north to have

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[91] See above.

[92] D. Fishwick, 'The Sixty Galli Tribes and the Altar of the Three Gauls', *Historia* 38 (1989), 111-112; *idem*, 'The Temple of the Three Gauls', *JRS* 62 (1972), 46-52, at 50-1.

[93] Creighton, *Coins and Power*, pp. 80-5, 101-25.

[94] Tacitus, *Agricola*, 16.

accepted the idea of Britishness as based upon adherence to a southern provincial centre.

Despite Colchester's potential function as a provincial capital and imperial cult centre, its role

in the creation provincial Britishness appears to have been limited, and the town may have

been marginalised by the emergence of London as the political and economic focal point

within southern Britain, as suggested by the inscriptions to *provincia Britannia* from the

town.

Under the Severan emperors in the early third century *Britannia* was sub-divided into

two provinces: *Britannia Superior* (central southern Britain), governed from London; and

Britannia Inferior (northern Britain), administered from York.[95] Inscriptions record the

activity of *Britannia Superior*'s officials in the lower province at Greta Bridge and

Chesterholm,[96] while a single inscription also from Chesterholm records the activities of the

propraetorian legate of *Britannia Inferior*.[97] *Britannia Inferior* appears, however, to have

been referred to locally as Brigantia – the personification and deification of the land of the

most powerful northern people, the Brigantes. As with the placement of the imperial cult at

Colchester, the creation of the Brigantia cult represents a reconfiguration of local power in

order to stimulate provincial affiliation, especially important in a formerly troublesome

region which lay, on the whole, beyond the urbanised areas of Britain.

That Brigantia or *Britannia Inferior* was not confined by the Wall is suggested by an

inscription from Birrens,[98] an outpost fort north of the *vallum*. Brigantia is also recalled at the

hinterland fort at Corbridge, demonstrating the military association of this deity.[99] Another,

now lost, inscription from the vicinity of Castlesteads dedicated to the 'goddess-nymph

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[95] Herodian, *History*, 3.8.2.

[96] *RIB*, 745, 747, 1696.

[97] *RIB*, 1706.

[98] *RIB*, 2091.

[99] *RIB*, 1131.

Brigantia' (*Deae nymphae Brig*) shows quite clearly the cultic aspects of this personification.[100] Indeed, both Brigantia and *Britannia* were female entities, suggesting links to fertility and well-being. The heartlands of the Brigantia cult appear, however, to have been in what is now central Yorkshire, with *D(eae) Vict(oriae) Brig(antiae)* inscriptions known from Greetland[101] near Halifax and Castleford,[102] with a third to the 'goddess Brigantia' from Adel, near Leeds.[103] That the Greetland inscription was set up by one Titus Aurelius Aurelianus, *magister sacrorum*, 'master of sacred rites' suggests that the worship of Brigantia was a cult of some importance requiring its own priesthood, though whether it was worshipped solely by the military community and other foreigners is unclear. Aurelius was a name often assumed by families granted the citizenship prior to the Edict of Caracalla and thus Titus Aurelius Aurelianus may have been a representative of a powerful local family participating in imperial affairs.

The structuring and restructuring of Britain's provinces and the establishment of cultic elements including the personification of the island and her regions suggests that the Romans were indeed attempting to integrate the Britons into the provincial framework which constituted the empire. However, problems remained for the island remained divided between *provincia* and *barbaricum* and the peoples of the far north still considered the enemies of the state.

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[100] *RIB*, 2066. Cf. T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Native political organisation in Roman Britain and the origin of middle Welsh *brenhin*', in M. Mayrhofer *et al* (eds.), *Antiquitates Indogermanicae* (Innsbruck, 1974), pp. 35-45.

[101] *RIB*, 627.

[102] *RIB*, 628.

[103] *RIB*, 630.

Cassius Dio

It was not until the third century that Roman narrative sources again provided a detailed account of the Britons. This is not to say that Cassius Dio's description of the Britons, discussed below, is an accurate depiction of the northern Britons – it is another ethnographic construct, an image of the barbarian. Nonetheless, it will demonstrate that the Caledonians were, from an ethnographic perspective, the most visible of the British peoples. Tacitus' narrative had of course ensured this; as had the dispersal of this tradition into other forms of Roman literature such as the poetry of the second-century poet, Martial:

> *Quinte Caledonios Ovidi visure Britannos et viridem Tethyn Oceanumque*
>
> *patrem.*[104]

> Quintus Ovidius, you are going to visit the Caledonian Britons and green Tethys
> and Father Ocean

Here there is no sense that the Caledonian Britons are a threat – rather they are wonderment comparable to the deified personifications of the Ocean and the mysterious isle of Tethys. But for other authors the Caledonii of northern Britain, now a people, represented the very essence of Britishness. It is indeed once again in Roman narrative history that we find the ethnographic concept of Britishness located in the northern reaches of *Britannia*. This comes in the *Roman History* of Cassius Dio, a Greek-speaking senator and member of the powerful Cassii family of Nicaea in Bithynia.[105] Written in Greek around A.D. 230, Dio's work contained an account of Roman history from its foundation under Aeneas to the reign of Septimius Severus. Indeed, Dio's concern was to the extent to which Roman greatness had decline under Severus and his sons, Caracalla and Geta, from the halcyon days of the

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[104] Martial, *Epigrams*, 10.44.

[105] T. D. Barnes, 'The Composition of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*', *Phoenix* 38 (1984), 240-55, at 241-2.

Antonines.[106] Thus Dio's account of the Severan campaigns in northern Britain during 208-11,[107] including his classic ethnographic description of the Britons, must be read in light of such negativity:

> There are two principal races of Britons, the Caledonians and Maeatae, and the names of the others have been merged into these two. The Maeatae live next to the cross-wall which cuts the island in half, and the Caledonians are beyond them. Both tribes inhabit wild and waterless mountains and desolate and swampy plains, and possess neither walls, cities, or tilled fields, but live on their flocks, wild game, and certain fruits; for they do not touch the fish which are there found in immense and inexhaustible quantities. They dwell in tents, naked and unshod, possess their women in common, and in common rear all the offspring. Their form of rule is democratic for the most part, and they are very fond of plundering; consequently they choose their boldest men as rulers. They go into battle in chariots, and have small, swift horses; there are also foot-soldiers, very swift in running and very firm in standing their ground. For arms they have a shield and a short spear, with a bronze apple attached to the end of the spear-shaft, so that when it is shaken it may clash and terrify the enemy; and they also have daggers. They can endure hunger and cold and any kind of hardship; for they plunge into the swamps and exist there for many days with only their heads above water, and in the forests they support themselves upon bark and roots, and for all emergencies they prepare a certain kind of food, the eating of a small portion of which, the size of a bean, prevents them from feeling either hunger or thirst…Such is the general character of the island of Britain and such are the inhabitants of at least the hostile part of it.[108]

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[106] Barnes, 'The Composition', 252-3.

[107] For details, see Fraser, *Caledonia*, pp. 22-9; Salway, *Roman Britain*, pp. 173-81.

[108] Dio, *Roman History*, 77.12.1.

Here the two principal races of Britons are presented as the very antithesis of the Mediterranean ideals of urbanism and civic virtue. Living naked, in swamps and on mountainsides, the Maeatae and Caledonii survive on hunting the fruits of the earth. As with the Caesarean Britons, the Caledonians and Maeatae share women in common; moreover, they are warlike, living off plunder and robbery, the standard barbarian 'economic system'. This imagery compounded the earlier constructs found in Caesar and Tacitus, reiterating the barbaric nature of the Britons. A similar picture of the Britons was painted by Herodian, another Greek author, who documented the reign of Severus.[109] But Dio wrote in contradistinction to his predecessors, arguing that the inhospitable nature of the landscape and the barbarity of its inhabitants rendered superfluous Severus' feeble efforts to conquer northern Britain. While from an ethnographic perspective, the northern Britons had not progressed from the Tacitean description, it is nonetheless important that this imagery perpetuated the anonymity of Britain's provincial inhabitants; indeed, the British peoples of literary interest remained those unconquered peoples dwelling at the ends of the earth.

Where did Dio locate the Caledonians and Maeatae – that is, from where did his concept of Britishness begin? First, we must retrace our steps as important developments in the Roman pacification of Britain had preceded the Severan campaigns of the early third century: the construction of the Walls of Hadrian and Antonine. Hadrian's Wall, which ran between Carlisle in the west and Wall's End in the east, was constructed, perhaps to Hadrian's own specifications, in the years following A.D. 122.[110] Following Hadrian's death in 138, however, his adopted son and successor, Antoninus, perhaps in order to increase his personal glory, moved the imperial boundary once again to the site of Tacitus' northern

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[109] Herodian, *History*, 3.14.6-8.

[110] Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 25-32.

terminus on the Forth-Clyde line where, according to the late fourth-century *Historia Augusta*,

> *Britannos per Lollium Urbicum vicit legatum alio muro caespiticio summotis barbaris ducto.*[111]

> through his legate Lollius Urbicus he [Antonine] overcame the Britons and, after driving back the barbarians built a second wall, one of turf.

Antoninus Pius celebrated a British victory on coins issued between 142 and 144 and the building of the upper Wall, which took place at this time,[112] has been seen as an advancement of the frontier.[113] What contemporaries made of the situation is less clear: readers of Tacitus might have imagined that the lands up to the Forth had always been Roman territory. The Antonine Wall was nevertheless abandoned by the early 160s and the Hadrianic frontier re-established[114] – that is, by the time Dio wrote his *Roman History* in 230, the line of demarcation between organised imperial space and *barbaricum* stood once again on the Tyne-Solway line.

Nonetheless, Dio's statement that regarded the Maeatae as living next to the cross-wall which cut the island in half has caused difficulties. Archaeological evidence in the form of coin-hoards and Roman campaign fortifications 'points to the home of the Maeatae in Fife, Strathearn and Menteith'.[115] That Dio referred to the upper Wall is seemingly confirmed by place-names Myot Hill, south of the Forth at Falkirk, and Dumyat ('the fort of the Maeatae'),

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[111] 'Life of Antonine', 5.5.

[112] Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 88-96.

[113] Whittaker, *Frontiers*, p. 36; Hanson and Maxwell, *Rome's North West Frontier*, pp. 59-74.

[114] Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 128-133.

[115] Hanson and Maxwell, *Rome's North West Frontier*, p. 203, with refs.

north-east of Stirling.[116] However, these names were coined in Gaelic and may therefore delineate the northern edge of Maeatan territory. Moreover, given that Tacitus' Caledonia had begun from the *terminus* on the Forth, there is little reason why the coin hoards or fortifications in this area were not located in southern Caledonia.

Is it, furthermore, accurate to perceive the upper Wall as cutting the island in half? Earlier in his narrative, Dio, in recounting Commodus' great struggle with the Britons (βρεττανικός), stated that barbarians had crossed the Wall which separated them from the legions, destroying a general and his troops.[117] Though this has been seen as ambiguous, the contradistinction between enemy and imperial space would suggest the Hadrianic Wall was meant. But more important is a passage which follows Dio's description of the northern Britons, one largely ignored by those who situate the Maeatae around the upper Wall. Here, Dio outlines the island's length as 7132 stades, stating that 'we hold a little less than one half'.[118] In conjunction with Dio's earlier statement in regards to the location of the Maeatae, the lower Wall seems the more likely location from which this barbarian federation began. Hence the peoples subsumed under the name Maeatae may have included the intramural groups such as the Votadini, Dumnonii, Selgovae and Novantae, even if they retained a sense of identity within the larger confederation.[119]

The intramural zone remained, however, an area in which Roman activity, military and diplomatic, continued into the fourth century; the position of these groups in relation to the empire is thus problematic and discussed further over subsequent chapters. The

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[116] F. T. Wainwright, 'The Problem of the Picts', in *idem* (ed.), *The Problem of the Picts* (London, 1955), pp. 1-53, at pp. 23-4; Fraser, *Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 15-17.

[117] Dio, *Roman History*. 73.8.1-2.

[118] Dio, *Roman History*, 73.12.5.

[119] Fraser, *Caledonia to Pictland*, p. 41; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 34-6. Cf. P. Heather, 'Disappearing and Reappearing Tribes', in Pohl (ed.), *Strategies of Distinction*, pp. 95-112.

prominence accorded to the Caledonians in Dio's account, particularly in the exchange between beyond the Maeatae nonetheless reinforced the fact that they occupied furthest Britain and thus the Caledonians maintained their dominant ethnographic position as the British barbarians *par excellence*.

Perception of the frontier zone in Roman society was probably influenced by a strong oral discourse disseminated amongst returning soldiers and officials; however, literary accounts remained significant, particular amongst the educated caste and the imperial court for structuring knowledge of imperial frontiers and the peoples beyond.[120] The Wall was a manifestation of imperial prestige in a region visited rarely by the emperor. Recent scholarship views the Wall as a zone of interaction designed to control rather than prevent movement through the landscape.[121] Despite notions of *imperium sine finibus*, the Wall from a cognitive perspective, as suggested by Dio's account, could amount to a line of demarcation between imperial and barbarian space; indeed, Dio's comment that Severus wished to conquer the entire island makes little sense otherwise.[122] Some ambiguity, then, perhaps existed in the minds of third-century Romans as to precisely where Roman territory ended and *barbaricum* began.

In this regard, the Wall's monumental status had the ability to play a determining role in the creation of provincial Britishness, providing a physical symbol differentiating between the provincial Britons and the barbarians from beyond the *limes*. That the Wall assumed such a role amongst the provincial population is suggested by the production of commercial

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[120] F. Millar, 'Emperors, Frontiers and Foreign Relations, 31 BC to AD 378', *Britannia* 13 (1982), 1-25, at 18; A. D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers: Roman foreign relations in late antiquity* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 32-48; R. Hingley, *Hadrian's Wall: A Life* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 16-18; R. G. Collingwood, 'Hadrian's Wall: A History of the Problem', *JRS* 11(1921), 37-66, at 39-45.

[121] Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 56-60.

[122] Dio, *Roman History*, 77.13.1.

artefacts – the Rudge Cup, the Ilam Pan and the Amiens *patera* –which reveal this monument had been popularised in the provincial imagination. These items – which list the names of the western Hadrianic forts from Bowness-on-Solway to Birdoswald or Great Chesters – were all found at significant distances from the Wall, in the 'civilian' zones of Roman Britain and northern Gaul. For instance, the Rudge Cup was found at a possible Roman villa at Rudge Coppice near Froxfield, Wiltshire; the Ilam Pan in the parish of Ilam, Staffordshire; and the Amiens *patera* within a Roman house in Amiens, northwest France.[123] Various dates have been suggested for their production, with the late Antonine age (161-92) finding favour.[124] Whatever the precise date of these objects, the Hadrianic Wall seems to have operated as something of a tourist destination in the Roman period: perhaps visitors were overcome by the sense that they stood at the very end of the earth, or at least its civilised part.

A memento of such a visit might have been worth acquiring as a keepsake; on the other hand, it is possible that these artefacts were mass-produced and available elsewhere as items that invoked the Wall's 'spirit', whether or not the owners had been to the Wall.[125] While it is hazardous to measure 'spirit', it seems possible that possession and dissemination of these objects within the provinces would have had the effect of stressing the delineating functions of the Wall. This then would perhaps have encouraged provincials to have developed an oral discourse which stressed the functionality of the Wall as the dividing line between empire and *barbaricum*, Briton and barbarian. Indeed, if raiding across the Wall was now affecting, as suggested in the accounts of Dio and Herodian,[126] the livelihoods of the

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[123] D. J. Breeze, 'Catalogue of the British Pans', in *idem* (ed.), *The First Souvenirs: Enamelled Vessels from Hadrian's Wall* (Kendal, 2012), pp. 1-8.

[124] E. Künzl, 'Enamelled Vessels of Roman Britain', in Breeze (ed.), *The First Souvenirs*, pp. 9-22, at pp. 18-22.

[125] One is reminded of seeing an 'I Love London' tee-shirt in the Lanes of Brighton.

[126] Dio, *Roman History*, 73.8.2; Herodian, *History*, 3.14.

disarmed provincials, even greater emphasis might have been placed on the differentiation between groups on either side of the frontier.

Citizenship

If these attitudes were developing within sections of provincial society in the late second century, it was an empire-wide development of the Severan era which provided the provincial Britons a method to securely differentiate between themselves and the barbarians. Following his assumption of sole rule, the son of Septimius Severus, Caracalla, issued in A.D. 212 the *Constitutio Antoniniana* or Edict of Caracalla, the universal grant of citizenship which enfranchised most freeborn persons within the empire, including the provincial Britons.[127] The contemporary observer Dio viewed Caracalla's motives cynically, regarding the edict as a means to increase the tax base.[128] A. H. M. Jones followed this notion.[129] However, more recent analysis regards this as a method to ease the administration of private law.[130] While Mathisen has argued that citizenship remained important for the incorporation of slaves and barbarian peoples into the empire,[131] it is widely assumed that the Edict devalued Roman citizenship as an aspect of identity and status across the Empire.[132]

However true this may or may not have been across the empire, in an insular context the contemporary and lasting importance of this legislation for the identity of Britain's

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[127] A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*, pp. 279-87.

[128] Dio, *Roman History*, 77.9.5.

[129] Jones, *LRE*, I, p. 16.

[130] T. Honoré, *Ulpian: Pioneer of Human Rights* (2nd edn., Oxford, 2002), p. 85; R. W. Mathisen, 'Concepts of Citizenship', in S. F. Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 744-763, at p. 745.

[131] Mathisen, 'Concepts of Citizenship', pp. 749-52.

[132] Sherwin-White, *Roman Citizenship*, pp. 444; P. Garnsey, 'Roman Citizenship and Roman Law in the Late Empire', in S. Swain and M. Edwards (eds.), *Approaching Late Antiquity: the Transformation from Early to Late Empire* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 133-55, at pp. 133, 135, 140; P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, 1992), p. 154.

provincial population cannot be underestimated, for it provided a mechanism for the communities dwelling under the empire's direct authority with which to distinguish themselves from the barbarian peoples of far northern Britain. While the entire island – *provincia* and *barbaricum* – might still be inhabited by *Britanni* the provincial Britons were now citizens of a global empire and thus were, notionally at least, fully incorporated into the empire and therefore distinguishable from all non-citizens. Caracalla had clearly not foreseen such a development, and in no way was this a direct intention of the Edict; nonetheless, the acquirement of citizenship was central to the creation of British provincial identity.

British citizenship is attested on inscriptions from Britain and beyond. For instance, one Decimus Vitalis is commemorated as a British *cives* on an inscription from *Germania Inferior*. Continental inscriptions, indeed, show the growth of Britishness as an imperial identity across the first to third centuries. In total, there are 26 verifiable inscriptions and Roman military diplomas which an individual refers to themselves or were remembered by their commemorators as *natione Britto*/*Britannicianus* or *Britto*.[133] The use of the label *natione Britto* may have been particularly popular amongst second generation emigrants who had no attachment to a specific regional grouping but wanted to stress their provincial origins in foreign surroundings.[134] Of course, it would have been unnecessary for provincials to assert this identity in everyday usage within Britain, particularly in localised contexts. However, in discourse with other provincial/ethnic groups situated within Britain, announcement of citizenship status and ethnic identity did, on occasion, become important. An inscription from Vindolanda, for example, commemorates concord between the *cives Galli et Britanni*,[135] referring either to an agreement between Gallic and British soldiers or

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[133] Ivleva, 'Remembering Britannia', p. 223.

[134] Ivleva, 'Remembering Britannia', p. 226.

[135] *RIB*-3, 3332.

perhaps reconciliation of local Brittonic peoples with the Gallic troopers stationed in their midst. Given the association between citizenship and military status the former might seem the most likely.

Whatever the case, British and Gallic identities were clearly validated on a wider level through the invocation of citizenship. To find this inscription, moreover, on the very limits of organised imperial territory perhaps reinforces not only the distinction between the communities on either side of the Wall but also the importance of place as a determining aspect of Britannic provincial identity. This is perhaps further evident in an inscription from a now lost altar formerly situated at Castlecary on the Antonine Wall, which in a much appears to record a group or individual Briton fulfilling a vow.[136] Given that the Antonine Wall represents the limits of organised imperial space and the lands beyond it were known, at least to Tacitus, as Caledonia, then this inscription might stand for a statement of Britishness at the very confines of the province. Tatiana Ivleva has in fact contrasted *Brittonus* with *Caledonus* by juxtaposing the Castlecary inscription with the altar of Lossio Veda the Caledonian dedicated at Colchester, arguing that each represents a pan-tribal identity, the former southern and the latter northern.[137] This is a fascinating possibility though it has to be remembered that the Caledonii, even when noted to be a confederacy, were still considered to be a British people in ethnographic accounts such as Dio's. Nonetheless, this is an intriguing possibility. However, rather than seeing merely a geographic divide between southern Britons and northern Caledonians, this should be view in terms of provincialized and un-provincialized.

Thus from 212, the inhabitants of the two British provinces could regard themselves as Roman citizens of Britain in contradistinction to the peoples from beyond the frontier. Whether such a distinction meant much in continental Roman circles is less clear. While,

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[136] *RIB*, 2152.

[137] Ivleva, 'Remembering Britannia', p. 227.

then, developments were being made within provincial society in terms of the integration of the Britons in the Roman world, this matter also brought unlooked for consequences. Indeed, towards the beginning of the third century another reason emerges for imperial and literary interest in Britain beyond the unconquered Britons: mutiny and usurpation. According to Dio and Herodian, and subsequently the fourth-century *Historia Augusta*, the British garrison became mutinous in the late second century, attempting to establish an alternative emperor against Commodus, either one Priscus or the new governor of *Britannia*, Pertinax.[138] Pertinax resisted the mutineers and was himself attacked and left for dead, subsequently requesting a transfer due to the animosity of the troops.[139] Britain's involvement in mutiny and usurpation continued when its garrison supported their commander Clodius Albinus' attempt for the purple in the last decade of the third century. Ultimately, Albinus was unsuccessful being killed at the battle of Lyon (A.D. 197) by his rival, Septimius Severus, commander of the *Illyricos exercitus*.[140] Albinus thus became the first in a long list of unsuccessful claimants for the imperial throne to emerge from Britain.

Ten years passed before Severus entered the island, suggesting that his military prestige assured through victory in battle guaranteed recognition of his status by the army in Britain. Both Dio and Herodian claimed that the northern campaigns were organized in order to occupy Severus' wayward sons, Caracalla and Geta.[141] This might have been the case; it nonetheless cannot have harmed Severus's plans for the succession if the army in Britain, one of the largest garrisons,[142] recognized the legitimacy of the sons' claims thereby nullifying

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[138] *HA*, 'Life of Commodus', 8.4; 'Life of Pertinax', 3.6; Dio, *Roman History*, 73.9.2.

[139] 'Life of Pertinax', 3.6-10.

[140] Herodian, *History*, 3.7.1-6.

[141] Dio, *Roman History*, 77.11.1.; Herodian, *History*, 3.14.2.

[142] Herodian, *History*, 2.15.1: 'a large and powerful force of extremely good fighters'. But see the contrasting comments at 3.6.6 used, according to Whittaker, to highlight Severus' trickery: 'His [Albinus] army is small and island bred'.

any possible claimant who might emerge on Septimius' death, which in fact occurred at York on the 4th February, A.D. 211. The numerous inscriptions honouring the Severan emperors indeed suggest that the island's military were anxious to demonstrate their loyalty.[143] Whatever the case, the works of Dio and Herodian demonstrate that within imperial histories a vision began to form of Britain's role in the creation of rebellious armies and (unsuccessful) usurpations; this, as we shall see in the following chapter, would have enormous repercussions for Britain's place in the empire in the late antique period.

Conclusion

Ethnographic imagery was embedded in various forms of literature and was disseminated widely through Roman society, particularly amongst its upper echelons, which included, of course, the imperial court. These constructs, indeed, exhibited a powerful effect on those exposed to them, with 'the image of the barbarian' being of vast importance in forming contradistinction between the structured world controlled by the Roman state and the uncivilized world of *barbaricum*.

In short, ethnographic stereotyping was extremely influential in creating and perpetuating images of distant societies encountered in the course of the Roman expansion. As one such distant society, the inhabitants of Britain, the *Britanni*, were subjected to this literary 'othering' which classified them as barbarians, a threat to Roman society and therefore the legitimate targets for imperial campaigns, subjugation and incorporation into the empire. Britain, then, was imagined as the 'ends of the earth', representing both a physical and cognitive extreme, highlighted by the real and imagined distance between the imperial court and this peripheral diocese. In contrast to the Mediterranean political and cultural centre, Britain symbolised the extremities of empire both in real and figurative terms, its

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[143] E.g. *RIB*, 152, 179, 185, 331, 465.

marginal geographical location remaining a key component in continental Roman attitudes towards the island.

Other problems remained: ethnography was concerned with hostile barbarians. Britain, only partly conquered, remained a theatre of war which attracted emperors and armies intent on pacifying recalcitrant *gentes*. Thus in a British context, the peoples of northern Britain, known by the third century as Maeatae and Caledonii, were ethnographically potent and formed the subject of an extended analysis of their, generally barbaric, customs and lifestyles. Indeed, frontier *gentes* were, in part, literary phenomena: the Tacitean tradition had established the Forth-Clyde line as a *terminus* between conquered and unconquered, and this precedent not only influenced the Roman 'advance' to the Forth and the construction of a frontier under Antonine, but also ensured the Forth was the low water mark from which the early third-century campaigns of Septimius Severus would depart. Whilst a multitude of reasons must have contributed to the decommissioning of the Antonine frontier and the return to the Hadrianic,[144] literary precedent could endure the physical abandonment of a fort-system in a distant province and thus maintain the notion that the Empire's boundaries lay on the ancient fault-line between 'civilised' and 'barbaric' peoples.

As a consequence of literary perceptions of Rome's British frontier, the intramural peoples – the Novantae, Selgovae, Votadini and Damnonii – stuck between the diocese and Rome's more virulent and time-honoured enemies beyond the Forth, were largely an irrelevance to Roman authors and their audiences, much like the various *civitas* populations of southern Britain. Despite their literary anonymity, the intramural peoples would come to play an increasingly important role in the late antique period; however, from a provincial

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[144] Breeze, *Northern Frontiers*, pp. 122-4.

perspective their British ethnicity was dictated by their non-citizen status, a matter which altered in the course of the early middle ages.

The Roman ethnographic construct of Britishness was, then, a literary creation which accentuated the importance of the peoples of far northern Britain. However, the Romans' inability or disinterest in subduing the entire island meant that stereotypical images of the Britons continued to circulate within Roman society centuries after the incorporation into the empire of the various regional populations of central and southern Britain. Indeed, from an ethnographic perspective the provincial population were now an irrelevance. Yet it was under these circumstances that the provincial population laboured to secure themselves an identity within the imperial framework. Prior to the emergence of citizenship this had proved difficult, although the construction of the Wall first began the process of differentiation from the northern barbarians, at least within provincial society. Greater integration, however, brought its own problems and the role of the army in the creation of British usurpers was a process which continued throughout the third and fourth centuries. Thus, as we shall see, the ethnographic legacy associated with the *Britanni* began to merge with continental Roman antipathy toward the island as an island of usurpers. It is to these matters which we now turn.

Chapter 3: Tyrants and Barbarians

Introduction

As we have seen, Britain was considered to have been the home of unpacified barbarians –
exemplified by the Caledonii – and Roman ethnographic literature emphasised the wild
qualities of the island and her inhabitants to the exclusion of her provincial population. The
purpose of this chapter is to build upon and expand those arguments and analyse how, when
Britain began to engage with the politics of the wider empire, this ethnographic stereotyping
took on new meanings as Britain produced an intermittent succession of failed usurpers. It
will further discuss the emergence of provincial Britishness and examine how the appearance
of a new people in the north of the island – the Picts – allowed the provincial Britons to build
upon developments of the third century in order to distinguish themselves further from the
northern barbarians.

Britain and the Constantinian Dynasty

Our discussion begins with an assessment of the relationship between the Constantinian
dynasty and Britain. It is sometimes stated that the first half of the fourth century – a period
coinciding with Constantinian dynastic stability in the north-western provinces – constituted
the 'Golden Age' of Roman Britain.[1] This is exemplified by the construction or elaboration
of several ostentatious villas such as Woodchester (Gloucester) and Lullingstone (Kent)
which demonstrate cultural affinities with the wider Roman world. As work on late Roman
Gaul has demonstrated, the presence of the imperial court was fundamental to the creation
and integration of a political class who participated in the affairs of state rather than solely
provincial or *civitas* politics.[2] However, despite the burgeoning wealth of the British

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[1] G. De La Bédoyère, *The Golden Age of Roma Britain* (Stroud, 1999), p. 9.

[2] H. Sivan, *Ausonius of Bordeaux: Genesis of a Gallic Aristocracy* (London, 1993), pp. 6-22.

landholding elite, this group do not seem to have attained the high-status achieved by their Gallic counterparts; indeed, as we shall see, antipathy seems to have existed towards Britain and the Britons in Gallic society. Nevertheless, it is suggested that while ancient prejudices were still ingrained within Roman views of Britain, the first half of the fourth century witnessed the apogee of Britishness as an imperial identity due to the close association between the island and the earliest Constantinian emperors.

Much of the third century is considered a period where 'crisis' engulfed the empire, with at least fifty-one individuals receiving the title emperor between 235 and 284.[3] In this period Britain had sometimes formed part of the so-called Gallic empire, which had arisen in order to provide support and patronage to local elites at a time of instability.[4] The Gallic empire, however, was thoroughly Roman in character: it was not an attempt to throw off the yoke of 'Roman' rule or culture. In Britain inscriptions declared the adherence of the military to the 'Gallic emperors' Postumus[5] and Tetricus,[6] suggesting the army's wilful participation and preferment of regionalised sources of power and patronage to distant and ineffectual emperors.

The instabilities of the third century were (almost) brought to a close at the accession of Diocletian in A.D. 284 and the subsequent creation of the Tetrarchy, 'the rule of four', a system of senior and junior emperors who would control specific regions of the empire thereby providing support and patronage throughout the provinces.[7] A mere two years after

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[3] J. F. Drinkwater, 'Maximinus to Diocletian and the 'Crisis', in A. K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and A. Cameron (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. XII, 'The Crisis of Empire', A.D. 193-337* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 28-66, at p. 28.

[4] Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, pp. 28-9.

[5] *RIB*, 820, 822, 2232, 2255, 2260.

[6] *RIB*, 1885, 2224-26.

[7] Jones, *LRE*, I, pp. 37-52; A. K. Bowman, 'Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy', in Bowman, Garnsey and Cameron (eds.), *CAH XII*, *The Crisis*, pp. 67-89, at 74-8.

Diocletian's accession, however, Britain came under the control of the usurpers Carausius (d. 293) and Allectus (d. 296).[8] Again, these rulers saw themselves as legitimate; this was not an attempt by 'the Britons' to break with Roman culture and identity. In 296 Constantius recovered the island for the 'legitimate' empire, although whether or not the inhabitants were upset at their period of separatism is difficult to assess, despite the claims of the panegyrics.[9]

The Constantinian emperors appear to have understood the need to reintegrate Britain into the empire, as according to Zosimus, Constantius resided much of the time in the island.[10] This would have stifled the rise of any potential usurper and given local elites access to an imperial court. Although Zosimus' comment suggests various periods of occupancy, this statement must primarily relate to Constantius' campaigns against the barbarians in northern Britain which took place in 305-6. Just like Septimius before him, Constantius following his punitive northern expedition was to die at York; here his son Constantine was proclaimed emperor by the army on 25 July 306, subsequently leading a successful usurpation from the island.[11] Later panegyrics made much of this occasion and Britain was deemed fortunate in their appraisal of Constantine's rise:

> *o fortunata et nunc omnibus beatior terris Britannia, quae Constantinum Caesarem prima vidisti*[12]

> O fortunate Britain and now more blessed than all lands, you who were the first to see Constantine as Caesar!

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[8] *Pan. Lat.*, 8.6.1.

[9] Todd, *Roman Britain*, p. 210.

[10] Zosimus, 2.8.2.

[11] M. Humphries, 'From Usurper to Emperor: The Politics of Legitimation in the Age of Constantine', *JLA* 1 (2008), 82-100, at 85-7.

[12] *Pan. Lat.*, 9.1.

Constantine, who tactfully accepted the title *Caesar*, went on to gain control of the empire through victories against his rivals Maxentius at Milvian Bridge (312) and Licinius at Cibelae (316) and Chrysopolis (324), reigning as sole emperor until his death in 337.[13] Constantine's son, Constantine II, succeeded him in Britain, Spain and Gaul. However, Constantine II maintained his rule over the north-western provinces for a mere three years before he was overthrown and killed by his brother, Constans, in 340 at Aquileia.[14] Constans then ruled the entire western empire, although elements within the Romano-British provincial and military communities may have resented Constans for killing the 'local' emperor and his British followers, for Constans was subsequently drawn mid-winter to the island sometime in the early 340s, possibly in order to subdue a rebellion.[15]

Having ruled the western empire for ten years, Constans was murdered and replaced by Magnentius, who is thought to have had a British father.[16] Magnentius' brief *imperium* (350-3) was swiftly followed by a brutal retribution on Magnentius' noble followers (*ingenuus*) in Britain carried out by Paulus *Catena*, 'the Chain', a subordinate of Constantius II, another son of Constantine who had initially ruled the East before challenging Magnentius' control of the West;[17] however, the now sole emperor recognised the need for a Constantinian representative in the West and appointed in 355 his nephew, Julian, Caesar to the north-western provinces. Julian's success in Gaul against the Franks and Alamanni, typified by his victory at the Battle of Argentoratum in 357,[18] saw his popularity rise to precipitous heights and under the threat that they would be forced to march beyond the Alps,

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[13] Humphries, 'From Usurper to Emperor', 88-99.

[14] D. Hunt, 'The successors to Constantine' in Cameron and Garnsey (eds.), *CAH XIII*, *The Late Empire*, pp. 1-4.

[15] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 27.8.4.

[16] *PLRE*, Vol. I, p. 532.

[17] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 14.5.6.

[18] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 16.12.

Julian's Gallic forces rebelled and declared him Augustus in 360.[19] Julian subsequently died in 363 whilst campaigning against Persia,[20] and thus, for all effects and purposes, ended the Constantinian dynasty.

The Constantinian dynasty had, then, ruled the north-western provinces throughout the first six decades of the fourth century, sometimes directly from Britain. And indeed their impact on the island's provincial landscape is detectable in the epigraphic record. Constantius, for example, is honoured or commemorated on thirteen British inscriptions, though only three were raised in his lifetime. Of these, two come from the northern military zone: one from Birdoswald which commemorates the repair of the headquarters building which had fallen into ruin;[21] and the second a milestone from Crindledykes Farm in the vicinity of the Wall.[22] The third is a milestone from Millbrook Farm, near Brecon.[23] Most of the references to Constantius as Augustus in fact appear after his death on monuments in honour of Constantine I (305-337).[24] That Constantine I, whether as Caesar or Augustus, left an impression on the provincial community is evident in the inscriptions dedicated to him. Interestingly, all extant inscriptions in honour of Constantine I come from milestones; what is more, these inscriptions are distributed across Britain in what were, or what were to shortly become, the four provinces of *Britanniae*, 'the Britains'.

This reorganisation took place under the authority of Diocletian (284-305) but due to the reigns of Carausius and Allectus may not have been enacted in Britain until after 298 or

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[19] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 20.4.9-22.

[20] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 25.3.2-6.

[21] *RIB*, 1912.

[22] *RIB*, 2301.

[23] *RIB*, 2258.

[24] *RIB*, 2233, 2237, 2220, 2242, 2267, 2303, 2302, 2310.

even during the reign of Constantine I.[25] From 314 at the latest, diocesan Britain, *Britanniae*, was divided into four provinces: *Maxima Caesariensis* (southeast and southern central Britain), governed from London (also the diocesan capital); *Flavia Caesariensis* (eastern and central Britain, below the Humber), with its capital at Lincoln; *Britannia Secunda* (northern Britain, above the rivers Humber and Mersey) administered from York; and *Britannia Prima* (western Britain), governed from Cirencester.[26] An elusive fifth province, *Valentia*, has proved more difficult to locate: it may have originated in the sub-division of *Britannia Inferior* between York and Carlisle;[27] or simply be the renaming of an old province rather than the creation of a new one.[28] Little evidence survives to document these provinces, though an inscription from Cirencester records the activities of the provincial governor (*praeses*) of *Britannia Prima*.[29]

As might be expected, a number of the inscriptions honouring Constantine I come from the northern frontier zone.[30] Others are situated in eastern Britain, *Flavia Caesariensis*, where, for instance, there are milestones from near Ancaster, Peterborough and Huntington.[31] In southern Britain, *Maxima Caesariensis*, a stone from Herschel Lodge near Worthing on the south coast, found under the remains of a Roman villa, also honours Constantine.[32] In the West – that is *Britannia Prima* – a milestone was discovered at Parsonage Farm, near

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[25] Jones, *LRE*, I, pp. 42-3, 47, 107.

[26] Salway, *Roman Britain*, pp. 229-31; Mattingly, *Imperial Possession*, pp. 227-9; White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 36-42. J. C. Mann reverses the locations of *Britannia Secunda* and *Flavia Caesariensis*: 'The Creation of Four Provinces in Britain by Diocletian', *Britannia* 29 (1998), 339-41.

[27] A. R. Birley, *The Roman Government of Britain* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 399-400.

[28] For the location of *Valentia*, and the difficulties in interpreting the evidence, see Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 28.3.7 with Salway, *Roman Britain*, pp. 289-93; White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 55-6; P. Bartholomew, 'Fourth-Century Saxons', *Britannia* 15 (1984), 169-85, at 178-9.

[29] *RIB*, 103.

[30] *RIB*, 2288, 2285, 2290-2, 2301, 2302, 2303, 2310.

[31] *RIB*, 2242, 2239, 2237.

[32] *RIB*, 2220.

Worcester.[33] However, what is of greater interest are milestones from the further reaches of the westernmost province: one four miles north of the Roman fort at Caerhun on the Conwy River in north-western Wales,[34] and another from St Hilary church, Cornwall.[35] While one might expect activity in the vicinity of a Roman fort, the inscription from far south-western Cornwall is somewhat surprising; indeed, this is well outside the 'romanised' areas of Britain, although the inscription itself corresponds with other milestones naming Constantine. There may have been some military activity in the area. Whether or not such a stone influenced the naming of Constantine of Dumnonia is unclear.[36]

It is possible, however, that some at least of these inscriptions, and indeed Constantine's popularity in Britain stem from his conversion to Christianity and the Edict of Milan in 313. Little certainty can be afforded in this, and it might be safer to conclude that these acts of imperial piety originated as the provincial community had an emperor in their midst or at a slight remove in the northern provinces. Whatever the case, the geographic distribution of these milestones indicates that Constantine's authority, whether as Caesar or Augustus, was recognised throughout Britain. Inscriptional evidence does little to illuminate the careers of the remaining Constantinian emperors; that Constantine's inscriptions were confined to milestones suggest the connection between construction and epigraphy was breaking down. In fact, the only inscriptions naming Constantine's offspring are a milestone from near Peterborough which mentions his ill-fated son Crispus, and another possibly naming Constantine II,[37] of whose brief reign we know little, other than that the island supported him against his brother Constans in 340. This stone comes from near Brecon, and

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[33] *RIB*, 2249.

[34] *RIB*, 2267.

[35] *RIB*, 2233.

[36] Gildas, *DEB*, 28.1; see Ch. 6.

[37] *RIB*, 2259.

again suggests that Constantinian authority was accepted in the further reaches of the province.

It is possible to conclude therefore that there was wide acceptance of Constantine's rule amongst the military which corresponds to the loyalty shown by the *Britannos exercitus* to other regional leaders in the third century and before. The long-term popularity of the Constantinian dynasty is indeed evident in fourth- and fifth-century naming-patterns amongst the Roman military in Britain. According to Orosius, for instance, the early fifth-century usurper Constantine III was hailed as emperor solely on the basis of his illustrious name.[38] Although a rather disparaging remark it is possible that Orosius was subverting Constantine III's attempt to legitimise the usurpation through claiming dynastic links with a former successful 'British' usurper. Whether or not this was the case, Constantine III was fully aware of the potency associated with the Constantinian dynasty, naming his two sons Constans and Julian.[39] This activity, while confined to milestones and naming-practices, indicates that in Britain the military community were actively engaged in declarations of imperial piety.

Amongst the provincials close relations with the imperial court would have offered an opportunity to seek advancement and patronage from the emperor himself. Possibly some of the milestones which honour Constantine I were raised by civilian communities. As noted above, Constantius I was thought to have resided often in Britain. Constantine I, unlike a number of other emperors was known to have visited the island on numerous occasions, with *adventus* coins of 314 and 316 commemorating his entry into the island. We do not know of any Britons who gained positions of authority under Constantine I or his successors; however, a certain *comes* Gerontius executed in Constantius II's reign was of possible British

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[38] Orosius, *Historia Adversum Paganos*, 7.40.4.

[39] Olympiodorus, Fr. 17, ed. and trans. Blockley, *FCHLRE.*, pp. 176-7.

origin.[40] Ammianus also talks of the suffering of Britain's nobility in the aftermath of Magnentius' usurpation suggesting that both military and civilian elites were anxious to see their power increase under the usurper,[41] perhaps in a return to earlier circumstances under Constantius, Constantine I and Constantine II. Evidence from villas in the southwest of Britain demonstrates architectural and cultural affinities with buildings from the eastern empire, suggesting the elite in this region were in contact with elites from the Mediterranean, possibly as a result of Constantinian interest and involvement in Britain.[42] The villa elites' prosperity was linked directly to the empire's fortunes and while he never travelled personally to Britain, Julian, Constantine's great-nephew, did ensure that British grain supplied the Rhine frontier, an action which was of probable benefit to Romano-British landowners.[43] It would therefore appear that from an internal perspective, the Constantinian emperors were, on the whole, held in high regard by Britain's provincial inhabitants.

As we shall see, Constantinian rhetoric in some respects reciprocates this feeling. However, traditional images of the Britons' place in the empire continued to circulate during the early fourth century. Constantine I, for instance, claimed the title *Britannicus Maximus*, 'Great Victor in Britain', for his activities there sometime between 312 and 314, suggesting that the island was still viewed as a theatre of warfare. Visitors to the imperial capitals of Trier and Rome, moreover, would have been left in little doubt that the Britons were considered the enemies of the imperial dynasty:

<p style="text-align:center">PARTHI OCCISI</p>
<p style="text-align:center">BRITTO VICTVS</p>
<p style="text-align:center">LVDITE ROMANI</p>

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[40] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 14.5.1.

[41] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 14.5.6.

[42] See Ch. 5.

[43] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 18.2.3.

> The Parthian has been slaughtered,
>
> the Briton conquered:
>
> play Romans![44]

Associated with Constantius I's British campaign of A.D. 305-6, these floor-panelled gaming-boards which celebrate the destruction of Rome's ancient enemies have been taken as representing imperial hostility towards the Britons.[45] Does, then, the rehearsal of the age-old 'alliance' between Britons and Parthians at the imperial residence of Trier truly reflect Constantius' hostility towards the Britons; or rather does this reflect the empty rhetoric of a bygone age and its inability to differentiate between British barbarians and British provincials?

The inability of Roman propaganda of the earlier Roman period to distinguish provincial from barbarian was a matter of some importance to the imperial Britons, having a detrimental effect on perceptions of them within the empire as a whole. That these gaming boards therefore embody an antiquated view of the Roman past – and the role of provincialized peoples within that past – reflects the conservatism of imperial culture and the inability or disinterest amongst continental Roman society to revise such views. That is, despite the provincial Britons' acquisition of citizenship there remained within Roman thought the notion that this people were, in some sense, unRoman.

It is of great interest therefore that in the material celebrating Constantius' restoration of Britain, the provincial Britons are portrayed favourably:

> *Merito igitur statim atque ad litus illud exoptatus olim undex et liberator*
>
> *appuleras, obuius sese maiestati tuae triumphus effudit, exsultantesque gaudio*

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[44] McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, p. 34.

[45] Jones, *End of Roman Britain*, pp. 152-64.

> *Britanni cum coniugibus ac liberis obtulerunt, non te ipsum modo, quem ut caelo*
>
> *delapsum intuebantur, sed etiam nauis illius quae tuum numen aduexerat uela*
>
> *remigiaque uenerantes, paratique te ingredientem stratis sentire corporibus. Nec*
>
> *mirum si tanto gaudio ferebantur post tot annorum miserrimam captiuitatem, post*
>
> *uiolatas coniuges, post liberorum turpe seruitium tandem liberi tandemque*
>
> *Romani, tandem uera imperii luce recreate.*

> And so it was fitting that, as soon as you stepped onto that shore, a long-desired
>
> avenger and liberator, a triumphal crowd poured forth to meet your Majesty, and
>
> Britons exultant with joy came forward with their wives and children, venerating
>
> not you alone, whom they gazed at as one who had descended from heaven, but
>
> even the sails and oars of that ship which had conveyed your divinity, and
>
> prepared to feel your weight upon their prostrate bodies as you disembarked. Nor
>
> is it any wonder if they were carried away by such joy after so many years of
>
> miserable captivity; after the violation of their wives, after the shameful
>
> enslavement of their children, they were free at last, at last Romans, at last restored
>
> to life by the true light of empire.[46]

This panegyric composed by an anonymous rhetor of Autun provides an important insight

into contemporary elite attitudes towards Britain. Indeed, despite earlier generations of

imperial rhetoric and the repetition of these attitudes in the imperial palaces at Rome and

Trier, the panegyric represents a rather different perception of the island and its inhabitants:

here the Britons – a label that refers to the free male population, accompanied as they were by

their wives and children – are cast not as barbarous inhabitants of the misty north but as

provincials, welcoming their liberator in joyful fashion. In fact, their liberation from tyranny

is cast as salvation, their restoration to the empire elevating them to the positions of Romans.

This is of course a statement of the legitimacy of the now deceased usurpers' rule (Carausius

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[46] *Pan Lat.*, 8.19.1-3.

and Allectus); but it also suggests that the provincials were considered innocent, enslaved victims of a barbarous pirate's tyranny rather than active instruments in rebellion.[47]

This is an important distinction. Previous images of Britain as a land of swamps and mists are indeed refuted in an earlier passage, where the island's qualities are praised, including its agricultural fertility in cereals and pastures, revenues, ores and harbours.[48] Again, Constantius' efforts to liberate the island and restore her to the empire must be deemed worthwhile, and praise of Britain's abundance was a perfect method of doing so. Context, then, was a vital barometer of attitudes towards Britain: Dio thought Severus' campaigns against the Britons were worthless ventures; Constantius' recovery of the island was a victory for the Roman empire and consequently the picture disseminated in the literature reflected this change in attitude; indeed, province was compared favourably with *barbaricum*. The Britons in fact seem to have progressed under the Romans, though some negative attributes remain:

> *Ad hoc natio etiam tunc rudis et solis Pictis modo et Hibernis adsueta hostibus adhuc seminudis, facile Romanis armis signisque cesserunt…*

> In addition to that, a nation which was then primitive and accustomed to fight, still half-naked, only with Picts and Hiberni, easily succumbed to Roman arms and standards…[49]

Described here as a *natio*, it is clear the *Britanni* were regarded in educated Roman circles as having submitted easily to Roman dominance.[50] However, the poet also recognised that the Britons were no longer half-naked savages, no doubt a consequence of their absorption into the empire. A half-hearted compliment, but a compliment all the same. The Panegyric of

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[47] *Pan Lat.*, 8.12.1.

[48] *Pan Lat.*, 8.11.1-2.

[49] *Pan. Lat.*, 8.11.4.

[50] Perhaps known widely enough to become proverbial: cf. Gildas, *DEB*, 6.2.

Constantius reflects a fairly positive view of Britain and the Britons: the rebellion of

Carausius and Allectus, which had not resulted in the death or overthrow of legitimate

emperors, had few repercussions on the external Roman world and the exultant spirit of

legitimist recovery brought the Britons back into the imperial fold rather than castigating

them.

The Creation of Pictishness

It is further aspects of this poem that have importance for Roman views of Britain and the

Britons. Already we have seen that Constantius' recovery elevated the Britons to Romans.

But we can attempt to view this elevation of identity from another perspective, that of the

provincials. Prior to the late third/early fourth century, the provincial Britons had in A.D. 212

become Roman citizens, though they still shared an ethnonym with the barbarians from

beyond the frontier. As the negative Roman ethnographic construct of Britishness failed to

distinguish between provincials and barbarians, there was in fact an incentive for the

provincial population to appropriate this construct. But in order to validate itself provincial

Britishness, as with all identities, required an opposing identity to which it could form in

contradistinction; much like Caesar had opposed Gallic identity to Germanic identity.[51] The

panegyric's reference to the Britons fighting with the Picts and Hiberni provided such a

contradistinction of identities; this is the first recorded mention of the Picts and, significantly,

this people, along with the Hiberni, are projected into the past as the time-honoured enemies

of the Britons. It is interesting that Pictishness could be presented in this manner: despite the

seeming novelty of the term, the author did not appear to consider them a new people.[52] The

contrast between provincial Britons and barbaric Picts is emphasised by the latter's position

at the ends of earth, in Britain's northern *barbaricum* where they submitted to Constantius:

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[51] Caesar, *BG*, 1.1.

[52] Cf. Dio's comments on the Maeatae, *Roman History*, 77.12.1.

nationes terminis eiusdem insulae cohaerentes uestris nutibus obsequantur,

the nations at the very limits of the island obey your very nod.[53]

Indeed, as with Dio's description of the wild north, a later panegyric composed in praise of Constantius' son, Constantine I, contrasts the worthlessness of barbaric Britain with the bountifulness of the Roman provinces referred to in Constantius' panegyric:

non dico Calidonum aliorumque Pictorum siluas et paludes.

I won't mention the forests and swamps of the Caledonians and the other Picts.[54]

In a sentiment somewhat reminiscent of Dio's, northern Britain is still regarded as a waste of forest and swamp; but although still home to the Caledonii this people are now Picts, not Britons. Thus the Caledonii, so prominent in earlier accounts of Britain retained their position as barbarians *par excellence* but now under a new ethnonym. Given the Romans disinclination in an earlier period to differentiate between provincial and barbarian Britons, we might ask what caused this change in nomenclature to emerge in the later Roman period. It might be thought of as a continental Roman development, but this, for reasons explored below, seems unlikely.

It is accepted widely that the name *Picti*, 'painted ones', is a Latin term which derives from the habit of tattooing with woad.[55] Caesar regarded this practice as an identifying feature of Britishness.[56] In the early third century, Herodian also considered this a

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[53] *Pan. Lat.*, 8.20.4.

[54] *Pan. Lat.*, 6.7.2.

[55] Fraser, *Caledonia to Pictland*, p. 47; K. H. Jackson, 'The Pictish Language', in Wainwright (ed.), *Problem of the Picts*, pp. 129-66, at pp. 159-60; N. Chadwick, 'The name Pict', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 8 (1958), 146-76, at 150-60.

[56] Caesar, *BG*, 5.14.

characteristic feature of the unconquered Britons.[57] The intervening period also produced a number of other references to the painted Britons.[58] To earlier generations of Roman writers, tattooing was a habit employed by the unconquered Britons: how then was this characteristically 'British' habit associated with a new people? It is suggested that despite the appearance of the ethnonym *Picti* in an imperial panegyric, the impulse to view the peoples of the north in contradistinction to the provincial population came neither from the imperial regime, who had been unconcerned previously to distinguish between the island's inhabitants, nor the anonymous panegyrist in whose panegyric the label first appears, but from within Romano-British society itself. That is, elements amongst the provincial population may perhaps have conceived themselves, at the latest, by the end of the third century to be self-consciously different from the population beyond the frontier, a difference articulated in the creation of a new description for the extramural barbarians. Indeed, this differentiation between imperial Britons and extramural Picts, though perhaps engineered by the Latin educated elite, who profited through their participation in the imperial regime, may have been acknowledged by the lower echelons of society also, particularly if the classification was predicated, in part, on differences between populations on the basis of terms derived from Latin.[59]

We cannot know for certain when the provincialized communities of Roman Britain desisted in the practice of tattooing. It certainly appears to have been popular amongst the peoples of the later Iron Age and early Roman periods,[60] and was probably connected to regional identities and warfare, elements of social display which had to be reconfigured in the

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[57] Herodian, *History*, 3.14.7.

[58] E.g. Ovid, *Amores*, 2.16.39; Martial, *Epigrams*, 11; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 22.1.

[59] If, indeed, Latin was widely spoken amongst provincials of all backgrounds in the fourth century: see Schrijver, 'What the Britons Spoke Around 400', pp. 165-71

[60] G. Carr, 'Woad, Tattooing and Identity in Later Iron Age and Early Roman Britain', *OJA* 24 (2005), 273-92, at 282-86.

Roman period. Communities most exposed to Roman cultural practice may have abandoned this habit during the early decades of imperial control,[61] with Roman notions of cosmetic grooming coming to replace previous uses of dyes and tattoos by the population of southern Britain.[62] Those communities further north, particularly in the far north of the island, presumably retained this habit as a method to display social status and other forms of identity and, perhaps, their antipathy to Rome and rejection of 'servile' provincial status. As warfare would have been a habitual part of societal practice in the unconquered north, 'woading' and tattooing presumably retained a prominence unmatched in the British provinces.

As we have seen, the acquisition of citizenship in 212 first provided the provincial Britons with one method of distinguishing themselves from the extramural barbarians; hence by Constantius' arrival in 298 the provincial Britons had had a significant amount of time for this distinction to enter into common perception; conceptualising themselves as Roman citizens of Britain, territorially, physically, and legally distinct from the populations from beyond the frontier. Territorially, the provinces were separated from *barbaricum* by the Wall; physically, the provincials did not partake in tattooing or 'woading'; and legally citizenship conferred a different set of societal rules which 'othered' the northern peoples.

The legal connotation of citizenship may have, in fact, helped harden the distinction between Roman Briton and unRoman Briton by taking a characteristic of the latter's behaviour and turning it into something anathema and opposed to British identity. In Roman society, tattooing was considered from a legal standpoint to mark servile status, with branding used to punish slaves and criminals.[63] As knowledge of Roman law increased throughout the literate classes of Romano-British society, the obsolete ritual habit of tattooing

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[61] Inferred from Tacitus, *Agricola*, 18.

[62] Carr, 'Woad', 286.

[63] C. P. Jones, 'Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity', *JRS* 77 (1987), 129-55, at 142-44, 147-51.

would come to be seen as a marker of servile status, inducing the literate classes to reinterpret this social custom amongst the northern peoples as a demonstration of their unRoman and barbaric status. Paradoxically, what had once for Roman authors been a marker of British identity appears for provincialized society the perfect tool to demonstrate, through Roman legal methodology, their differentiation from the northern barbarians. The identification of an opposing identity was then central to construction of British provincial identity.

As we noted above, the Picts were now cast as an imperial enemy. This notion persisted into the fifth century and indeed beyond, into the earliest medieval centuries. While the provincial Britons appear to have undergone an ethnogenesis in this period, this does not, however, appear to have had an appreciable effect on their fortunes within imperial circles; indeed, the favourable attitudes displayed in the Panegyric of Constantius were quickly dissipated. Perhaps it was the inability of the Britons to penetrate the ranks of the imperial elite that had the most detrimental consequences for their perception within Roman society. In no small part, this must be seen as a result of the imperial court's infrequent sojourns in Britain; while Constantius and Constantine had both spent time in Britain, the panegyrics reveal their close association with Gallic towns such as the imperial capital of Trier or other major provincial centres such as Autun.[64] In fact, the fortunes of the Britons can be usefully compared with those of the Gallic aristocracy in the same period. While their participation in the imperial regime may have been a fairly recent development, the Gallic aristocracy were integrated in imperial politics in a manner in which their British counterparts do not appear to have achieved, even remotely.

The closeness of the Gallic elite to the imperial regime is exemplified by the career of Ausonius, a rhetor from Bordeaux who gained the patronage of the emperor Valentinian I and

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[64] Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, pp. 6-7, 26-33.

his son Gratian.[65] Since the days of Tacitus, the southern Gallic elite had been immersed in Latin culture which included creating ethnographic views of barbarian peoples such as the Britons. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that a society indulging in classical forms of Roman literary expression were comfortable in casting the Britons in certain conventional ways; the caustic response of the imperial tutor and rhetor Ausonius to the British poet who had dared criticise his verse revealing in its snobbery:

> *Silvius ille Bonus, qui carmina nostra lacessit, nostra magis disticha, Brito bonus.*
>
> *Silvius hic Bonus est. ' Quis Silvius?' Iste Britannus. Aut Brito hic non est Silvius, aut malus est*
>
> *Silvius esse Bonus fertur ferturque Britannus : quis eredat civem degenerasse bonum ?*
>
> *Nemo bonus Brito est. Si simplex Silvius esse incipiat, simplex desinat esse bonus.*
>
> *Silvius hic Bonus est, sed Brito est Silvius idem: simplicior res est, credite, Brito malus.*
>
> *Silvi, Brito Bonus: quamvis homo non bonus esse ferris nec iungere Brito Bono*[66]

> That "Good" Silvius who attacks our verse, has the more fully earned our lampoon, being a good Briton.
>
> This is Silvius "Good."' Who is Silvius? He is a Briton. Either this Silvius is no Briton, or he is Silvius "Bad".
>
> Silvius is called "Good" and called a Briton: who would believe a good citizen had sunk so low?
>
> No man is a good Briton. If he should begin to be plain Silvius, let the plain man cease to be good.
>
> This is Silvius Good, but the same Silvius is a Briton: a plainer thing – believe me – is a bad Briton.

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[65] Sivan, *Ausonius*, pp. 97-141.

[66] Ausonius, *De Quodam Silvio Bono Qui Erat Brito*, *Epigrams*, 108-112.

> Thou Silvius art Good, a Briton: yet 'tis said thou art no good man, nor can a
> Briton link himself with Good.

Ausonius, in cutting fashion, might then have disparaged Silvius Bonus on the resonance between *Brito* and *Bono*; however, such a witty riposte may have been far more effective when widely understood and appreciated by Ausonius' audience of Roman and Gallic aristocrats. While this might represent the disgruntled response of a haughty aristocrat to a rival, it seems likely given the extensive ethnographic and historical traditions surrounding the Britons that the equation of 'Britishness' and 'badness' was in fact a convention of the age.

But Ausonius might have had personal reasons to supplement the negativity surrounding Britishness in imperial circles. First, Ausonius' kinsmen had served in Britain: his uncle, Contemtus appears to have died in Britain, perhaps prematurely; and his brother-in-law, Sanctus, had served as *praeses* in the 'Rutupian land'.[67] The name *Rutupiae* derives from the Roman town of Rochester (Kent) and Ausonius may have been using it as a synonym for Britain. The death of Ausonius' uncle and any negative views held by his kinsmen may have led Ausonius to adopt a hostile or disparaging attitude towards the island and her inhabitatants. However, Ausonius had a personal grudge towards the island in the form of Magnus Maximus. Maximus, who led a rebellion from Britain in 383, killing Gratian – Ausonius' pupil – and driving Valentinian II exile in the east, suffered condemnation at the hands of imperial poets.[68] Ausonius regarded Maximus as nothing more than a 'camp-follower' (*lixa*) and the 'robber of Richborough/Britain' (*Rutupinum…latronem*).[69] Later, certainly, Maximus drew opprobrium for the killing of Gratian and the exile of Valentinian II.

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[67] Ausonius, *Parentalia*, 7.1-5, 18.8.

[68] See below.

[69] Ausonius, *Ordo Urbium Nobilium*, 9.6-8.

And, as we shall see, it is the usurpation of this individual that created the greatest impression on late antique Roman images of Britain deriving from the western imperial court.

Britain and the Theodosian Emperors

In the last decades of the fourth century, the Theodosian dynasty emerged as the dominant imperial family in east and west.[70] Their dealings with Britain were many and varied, and reached across the generations to be remembered in various literary forms, historical and poetic. This final section is concerned mainly with the writings of the historian Ammianus Marcellinus and court poet Claudius; both have important information relating how Britain and Britons were viewed in the western empire in the late fourth and early fifth centuries; their respective viewpoints offer insights into general conceptions of the island and her inhabitants and ones specific to the imperial court. We begin with a discussion of Ammianus.

Ammianus Marcellinus

Ammianus Marcellinus, a Greek from Antioch, composed his work, *Res Gestae* around A.D. 390.[71] Unlike other historians of east Roman origin such as Cassius Dio, Herodian and Zosimus, Ammianus wrote in Rome and composed his work for a Latin-reading audience. Ammianus' familiarity with Latin was perhaps the consequence of his career in the army, where Latin was the *lingua franca*; serving as *protector* in the retinue of the general

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[70] Jones, *LRE*, I, pp. 173-94.

[71] R. C. Blockley, *Ammianus Marcellinus: A Study of his Historiography and Political Thought* (Brussels, 1975); J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London, 1989), p. 8; J. W. Drijvers and D. Hunt (eds.), *The Late Roman World and its Historian. Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*; for a conflicting view, see G. W. Bowerstock, 'Review of Matthews (1989), *JRS* 80 (1990), 244-50 at 247; C. W. Fornara, 'Studies in Ammianus Marcellinus I: The Letter of Libanius and Ammianus' Connection with Antioch', *Historia* 41 (1992), 328-44.

Ursicinus, Ammianus had travelled to Gaul where he was involved personally in the assassination of the usurper Silvanus.[72]

Res Gestae was divided into thirty-one books which covered the period between the accession of Nerva in A.D. 96 until the death of Valens at Adrianople in A.D. 378; a structure perhaps intended to emulate the historical writings of Tacitus, whose work concluded in A.D. 96 and was read as a single thirty-book volume in late antiquity.[73] Of Res Gestae's thirty-one books, only fourteen to thirty-one are extant; covering the period from the diabolical (to Ammianus at any rate) reign of Gallus to the reigns of Valentinian and Valens, Res Gestae has been viewed as a moralizing tract contemplating the attributes, good and bad, of various emperors.[74] One of Ammianus' main objectives certainly appears to have been the praise of the emperor Julian, a fellow pagan whose campaigns against the northern barbarians and more so the Persians represent some of the most elaborate and significant elements of Res Gestae.[75]

For our purposes, it is Ammianus' view of the barbarian world and his perpetuation of the stereotypes found in earlier works that are of interest. Indeed, his history contains a number of geographic and ethnographic digressions, of which certain episodes are elucidated below, formulated very much inline with the precepts of the historical genre in which Ammianus wrote. As we have seen, 'conquest narratives' utilised ethnographic descriptions when an emperor or general entered into barbarian territory or came into contact with hostile peoples. But, as suggested below, while Ammianus attempted to adhere to this convention he

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[72] Res Gestae, 15.5.27-31; D. Hunt, 'The outsider inside: Ammianus on the rebellion of Silvanus', in Drijvers and Hunt (eds.), Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus, pp. 51-63.

[73] D. Rohrbacher, The Historians of Late Antiquity (London, 2002), pp. 20-5.

[74] Blockley, Ammianus Marcellinus, pp. 18-54; M .Whitby, 'Images of Constantius', in Drijvers and Hunt (eds.), Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus, pp. 77-88.

[75] Res Gestae, 16.2-5; see R. Smith, 'Telling tales: Ammianus' narrative of the Persian expedition of Julian', in Drijvers and Hunt (eds.), Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus, pp. 89-104.

faced difficulties in adapting this model to the altered circumstances of fourth-century Roman Europe.

It is a much lamented fact that the books which recount Constans' expedition to Britain in 343 have been lost.[76] We cannot therefore be certain what, if any, ethnographic descriptions would have been included in Ammianus' British digression. But given the historiographical tradition within which he wrote, it is probable that Ammianus would have included an ethnographic description of the island and its inhabitants in order to perpetuate the conventions of his genre. An indication of what might have been contained in Ammianus' British digression can be gleaned from his account of Julian's entry into Gaul, which included a section entitled *De moribus Gallorum*:

> *Celsioris staturae et candidi paene Galli sunt omnes et rutili, luminumque*
> *torvitate terribles, avidi iurgiorum, et sublatius insolentes. Nec enim eorum*
> *quemquam adhibita uxore rixantem, multo se fortiore et glauca, peregrinorum*
> *ferre poetrit globus, tum maxime cum illa inflata cervice suffrendens,*
> *ponderansque niveas ulnas et vastas, admixtis calibus emittere coeperit pugnos, ut*
> *catapultas tortilibus nervis excussas.*[77]

> Almost all of the Gauls are of towering stature, radiant and red, dreadful for the
> savageness of their eyes, eager of quarrels, and of overbearing insolence. In fact, a
> whole band of foreigners will be unable to cope with one of them in a fight, if he
> calls in his wife, stronger than he by far and with flashing eyes; least of all when
> she swells her neck and gnashes her teeth, and poising her huge white arms, begins
> to rain blow mingled with kicks, like shots discharged by the twisted cords of a
> catapult.

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[76] Constans' British expedition is alluded to in books 20.1 and 27.8.4., where Ammianus refers to his now lost British digression.

[77] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 15.12.

Here we are faced with a classic ethnographic description of a barbarian society: the prominent and violent role assigned to Gallic women demonstrating the outlandishness of the Gauls through the feminine colonisation of a masculine role; indeed, this depiction indeed bears similarities to Tacitus' and Dio's revulsion (and wonderment) at the role played by Boudicca during the Icenian revolt.[78] Of course, the image created by Ammianus was obviously not of contemporary Gallic society, but rather an antiquated and stylised vision based upon conventions established by earlier traditions of ethnography.[79] Given that Ammianus had travelled personally to Gaul, his vision of Gallic society is even more surprising; though of course as a visitor from the cultured Greek east Ammianus may have felt a certain amount of disdain for the inhabitants of the western provinces.

Why, then, did Ammianus deign it appropriate to include this description of the Gauls? First, the expectations of Ammianus' readership must be taken into account. Educated Roman audiences expected such imagery in their historical narratives as established in the works of Caesar, Tacitus and Dio, and clearly desired to be enthralled by the barbaric and exotic customs of a foreign people; thus sketching the *romanitas* of contemporary Gallic society, typified by the cultural achievements of fourth-century Gallic aristocrats such as Ausonius of Bordeaux, would have done little for Ammianus' reputation as a writer. There might even be, therefore, a hint of the comedic about this episode, with the literate Roman classes being well aware that this was some sort of spoof depiction of a provincial society.

More importantly, Julian was central to *Res Gestae* and the momentousness of his achievements must be reflected in the narrative. According to Woolf, Ammianus wrote in the epic tradition; Julian's entry into Gaul was thus equated with Aeneas' entry into Italy as

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[78] Tacitus, *Agricola*, 16.1; Dio, *Roman History*, 62.1-12.

[79] Given that Ammianus mentions Cato during this passage, suggests that he utilised at least one ancient author; Matthews, *Ammianus*, p. 39; Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians*, pp. 110-111.

found in Virgil's *Aeneid*, both adventures being thrusts into the unknown.[80] This tradition was present in Caesar's *Gallic Wars* which, as we have seen, documented the expansion of the Roman power and the conquest and incorporation of 'unknown' barbarians into the empire; his account of Gallic, Germanic and Britannic societies, particularly his description of the customs and habits of these hostile barbarians, forming an intrinsic element within his conquest narrative. Such ethnographic depictions accompanied the march of imperial armies into barbarian territory, revealing these *gentes* to Roman audiences for the first time: thus Caesar's description of the *Germani* preceded the crossing of the Rhine, while his depiction of the Britons came during the second British incursion, thereby accentuating Caesar's initial foray as an expedition against an unknown people.[81]

Ammianus, however, laboured under different circumstances as his account depicted a society long since provincialized. While convention demanded Julian venture into the unknown, Ammianus' adherence to this literary model presented certain difficulties, for Julian's barbarian enemies were not the Gauls but rather barbarian Franks and Alamanni. Unlike his predecessors who had recounted tales of imperial expansion or forays beyond the *limes*, Ammianus wrote during a period when sorties against the enemy were as likely to take place within the empire as outside; indeed, while Julian did venture beyond the frontier the defining moment of Julian's presence in Gaul was the defeat of the Alamanni in imperial territory, at the Battle of Strasbourg (357).[82] Constrained by contemporary political circumstances and the conservatism of ethnographic knowledge, which by the late fourth century was of limited value in creating descriptions of 'new' peoples, Ammianus forced the account of Julian's Gallic campaign into the established tenets of the historical genre. Hence

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[80] Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians*, pp. 106-8.

[81] See Ch. 2.

[82] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 16.2.

in describing an encounter between Romans and barbarians on Roman soil, rather than in *barbaricum*, the rationale that supported the association between conquest narrative and ethnographic digression – principally the notion of the venture into 'another world' – began to break down.

With these points in mind, we can return to consider what might have been contained in Ammianus' British digression: precedent demanded he describe the island's inhabitants as barbarians. However, while Ammianus struggled with the conventions of conquest narrative in presenting Julian's entry into Gaul as a step into *barbaricum* amongst the barbaric Gauls, an even more complex situation existed in regards to *Britannia*. Roman ethnography had located Britishness in the far northern reaches of the island, yet as had been established earlier in the century, barbaric northern Britain was no longer populated by Britons. Indeed, between the campaigns documented by Cassius Dio, where the Caledonians and Maeatae were described as 'Britons', a new people, *Picti*, had emerged to occupy northern Britain. This group were well known to Ammianus as an enemy of the British provinces.[83] Ammianus' reference to the Picts suggests, however, that the historian felt a degree of puzzlement over this people:

> *quod eo tempore Picti in duas gentes divisi, Dicalydones et Verturiones*

> at that time the Picts were divided into two peoples, the Dicalydones and Verturiones.[84]

Ammianus was known to have read Tacitus, where he would have encountered the Caledonians. But whereas Tacitus regarded the inhabitants of Caledonia as Britons, fourth-century Caledonians were *Picti*. Might, then, Ammianus' use of the prefix *di* be seen as an attempt to explain the transformation of the Caledonii from British people to Pictish *gens*?

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[83] E.g. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 20.1.1.

[84] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 20.1.1; 27.8.5.

For our purposes, it is irrelevant whether or not the overarching ethnic label *Picti* held any significance for the peoples of northern Britain;[85] rather, the key point is that to continental Roman perceptions, the threat from the north originated from where it had always done – in the far north. But precisely where in the north? Alex Woolf has made a persuasive case for viewing the Verturiones as being the forerunners of the later Pictish kingdom of Fortriu, located to the north of Mounth.[86] This leaves the Dicalydones. Halsall has expressed doubt that, for the Romans, Pictishness began at the Forth, arguing instead that the Dicalydones represent the peoples of the intramural zone.[87] However, as we have seen, Caledonia and the Caledonii had always been associated with the lands beyond the Forth; while this confederation might have stretched further south it seems doubtful that it encompassed the entire intramural zone. Rather, the Dicalydones and Verturiones should be seen as the peoples occupying the lands around and beyond the Forth, with the intramural zone falling outside the ethnographic construct depicted by Ammianus. That is not to say that the intramural zone was occupied by essentially peaceful communities but rather that Ammianus' account was in some senses circumscribed by the 'vision of Britannia' perpetuated within earlier texts such as the *Agricola*.

What seems clear from other contemporary texts, however, is that the Wall did indeed mark a line of demarcation between empire and *barbaricum* in the later Roman period. The concept of *imperium sine fine* had begun to disappear from the third century,[88] replaced by an understanding amongst later Roman society that the frontiers of the empire now formed

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[85] See Fraser, *Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 43-67.

[86] A. Woolf, 'Dún Nechtain, Fortriu and the Geography of the Picts', *SHR* 85 (2006), 182-201, at esp. 197-201.

[87] Halsall, 'Northern Britain', 10.

[88] M. Graham, *News and Frontier Consciousness in the Late Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor, 2006), p. ix

'physical boundaries and static boundaries'.[89] The empire was now seen increasingly in terms of defined space. When we examine comments on Britain's northern frontier, found, for example, within the fourth-century *Historia Augusta*, a compilation of imperial lives claiming to be the work of numerous authors, now understood to be the product of a single writer,[90] this sentiment is very much to the fore:

> *Ergo conversis regio more militibus Britanniam petiit, in qua multa correxit*
>
> *murumque per octoginta milia passuum primus duxit, qui barbaros Romanosque*
>
> *divideret.*[91]

> Then, having transformed the army quite in the custom of a king, he made for
>
> Britain, where he corrected many abuses. He was the first to construct a wall,
>
> eighty miles in length, which was to divide Romans from barbarians.

This is the first textual evidence we have accrediting Hadrian with the construction of a *murus*, 'stone wall', within Britain. More important is the unequivocal statement that the wall's function 'was to divide' (*divideret*) Romans from barbarians. There is little room for ambiguity here: the *murus* demarcated Roman and barbarian territory. Hadrian's role in the construction of the Wall was soon forgotten; indeed, later in the same compilation Septimius Severus is given credit for this monument:

> *Britanniam, quod maximum eius imperii decus est, muro per transversam insulam*
>
> *ducto utrimque ad finem Oceani munivit. unde etiam Britannici nomen accepit.*

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[89] J. W. Drijvers, 'The Limits of Empire in the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus', in O. Heckster and T. Kaiser (ed.), *Frontiers of the Roman World: Proceedings of the Ninth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 13-29, at p. 14.

[90] R. Syme, 'The Composition of the Historia Augusta: Recent Theories', *JRS* 62 (1972), 123-33; J. N. Adams, 'On the Authorship of the *Historia Augusta*', *CQ* 22 (1972), 186-94.

[91] *Vita Hadriani*, 11.2.

He built a wall across the island from one side to the boundary of the Ocean, and

thus made Britain secure — the crowning glory of his reign; from where,

furthermore, he took the name Britannicus.[92]

The tradition that Severus constructed a *murus* or *vallum* came to dominate late antique historiography, and was repeated by, amongst others, Eutropius and Orosius.[93] Indeed, this was the standard view amongst nineteenth-century antiquarians.[94] Here, the function of the Wall is to secure Britain, presumably against barbarians. Again, this can be seen as reinforcing the distinction between the British Roman citizens of *Britannia* and the extramural barbarians. The similarity between this account and the others referred to above suggests that late antique authors perceived the British Wall, and other *limites*, as firm boundaries between imperial and barbarian space.[95] That the peoples immediately adjacent to the Wall were not considered *Picti*, at least in Roman sources, was a result of earlier ethnographic accounts which positioned the hostile peoples of northern Britain beyond the Forth.[96]

Thus the Picts, as the 'successors' to the northern Britons, inherited their position in *barbaricum* and their status as enemies of Rome. Crucially, however, the Picts, as far as we can tell from Ammianus' account, had not inherited the ethnography associated with the northern Britons; he did not give them any identifying traits and this must be the key factor in deducing where Ammianus located Britishness during his digression. As we have seen, the provincial population in earlier histories were ethnographically invisible; Tacitus, Dio and Herodian had associated Britishness with the Caledonii and located it within *barbaricum*. For

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[92] *Vita Severi*, 18.2.

[93] Eutropius, *Breviarum Historiae Romanae*, 19; Orosius, 7.17.7.

[94] Collingwood, 'Hadrian's Wall', 52-6; Hingley, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 16-18.

[95] Drijvers, 'The Limits of Empire', pp. 22-3.

[96] The relationship between the intramural peoples and 'Rome' is considered in Ch. 7.

Ammianus, however, this was problematic. The only *Britanni* known to him were the communities dwelling below the Wall, who he also referred to as *provinciales* or *tributarii*.[97] Presented with this paradox, it seems likely that during his description of Britain Ammianus attached the ethnographic descriptions, previously describing the peoples of the far north, to the remaining population group who bore the ethnic name *Britanni*: the provincial Britons.

Thus in a cruel twist of fate, the emergence of the Pictish terminology in the late third century may possibly have had ramifications for the perception of the Britons in later continental Roman society, perpetuating the image of them as barbarous and uncivilised. Having been pushed to the extremities of far northern Britain, the conservatism of the historical genre and the restraints of ethnographic knowledge now repositioned ethnographic Britishness amongst the formerly anonymous provincial population in the lower reaches of the island.

As noted above, ethnographic description was an expected part of historical writing and consequently this posited description may have been viewed tongue-in-cheek by Ammianus' audience. However, as seen in Ausonius' caustic remarks about Silvius Bono, real hostility existed towards the Britons in Roman society, particularly amongst the literate classes. Indeed, though Ammianus may have included outdated descriptions of both Gallic and Britannic society, these provincial groups were positioned differently in late Roman society: the Gauls had assumed positions of authority within the empire and any denigration found in accounts such as *Res Gestae* could be countered, politically and literally.[98] The

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[97] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 27.8.7, 28.3.1.

[98] Sivan, *Ausonius*, pp. 14-22.

Gallic legions were, furthermore, known to be ferocious warriors, particularly for their deeds against the Persians as related by Ammianus.[99]

On the other hand, the Britons appear to have been marginalized. If, indeed, Ausonius' poem on Silvius Bono stands as an indication of their fortunes in the empire, British attempts at integration were subject to ridicule and scorn. Britain's marginality had in fact long been a theme of imperial propaganda.[100] The island was perceived to be at the 'ends of the earth' and this situation perhaps accounts somewhat for the continuing 'othering' of British society within imperial circles. In *Res Gestae*, for example, Ammianus, when describing Theodosius' mission to Britain in 368-9 (see below), stated *orbis extrema dux efficacissimus petens* 'that most powerful leader made for the earth's end.'[101] Britain's geographic position on the confines of the earth, indeed in the Ocean beyond those limits, would have been well known to Roman audiences, even if they did not possess first-hand knowledge of the island.

Britain's marginal status, however, was no mere literary trope. Rather, it was reality exploited by the Roman state, who in order to rid themselves of undesirables frequently dispatched political and religious malcontents to the island. Ammianus, for example, mentions certain individuals, including Frontius, an advisor to Hymetius the former pro consul for Africa, who were exiled to Britain for offences against the emperor Valentinian.[102] Similarly, Palladius, an adherent of the emperor Constantius was exiled for speaking against the Caesar, Gallus.[103] Ammianus' account similarly recognises that Britain was a dangerous place where rebellion was easily fermented between seditious exiles and rebellious soldiery,

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[99] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 19.6.

[100] See Ch. 2.

[101] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 27.8.3.

[102] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 28.1.17-23.

[103] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 20.3.3.

highlighted by a certain Pannonian exile, Valentinus, attempting to serve his *cupiditatis immensae* 'vast ambition' and raise rebellion in the island.[104]

Britain was also depicted as a theatre of warfare, particularly in terms of the barbarian menace, typified by the ferocious Picts and Scots. Ammianus inherited from earlier generations of Roman authors, historical and poetical, certain notions regarding the relationship of imperial and barbarian space; in particular, he imagined the Roman world ringed by barbaric *gentes*. Unlike authors of the earlier Roman period who composed at a time of imperial triumph and expansion, Ammianus wrote in the aftermath of the great defeat at Adrianople (A.D. 378) which saw the destruction of the emperor Valens and the eastern field army.[105] The uncertainty caused by the Gothic triumph shook contemporaries and this gloomy outlook somewhat pervades Ammianus' narrative. Despite, or perhaps due to Ammianus writing in the aftermath of such an event, recent commentators have been inclined to view Ammianus as exaggerating the threat posed by barbarians to the security of the Roman empire, particularly along the Rhine and Danube.[106] In a British context, modern historians point to one event in particular as an example of Ammianus' inclination to overstate the hazards posed by barbarian incursion. This is the *barbarica conspiratio*, 'barbarian conspiracy' of 367:

> *Profectus itaque ab Ambianis, Treverosque festinans, nuntio percellitur gravi, qui*
> *Britannias indicabat barbarica conspiratione ad ultimam vexatas inopiam,*

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[104] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 27.3.2-6.

[105] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 31.12-13.

[106] J. Drinkwater, 'Ammianus, Valentinian and the Rhine Germans', in Drijvers and Hunt (eds.), *Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*, pp. 113-22, at pp. 114-17.

Nectaridumque comitem maritime tractus occisum, et Fullofaudes ducem

hostilibus insidiis circumventum.[107]

Having set out then from Amiens and hastening to Trier, Valentinian was alarmed

by serious news which showed that Britain was brought into a state of extreme

need by a conspiracy of the barbarians, that Nectaridus, the *comes* of the coastal

region, had been killed, and the *dux* Fullofaudes had been ambushed by the enemy

and taken prisoner.

Primarily, concern has been raised amongst historians at the prominence given to Theodosius

the Elder, the father of emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395) in whose reign Ammianus

wrote. Due to this, it has been suggested that Ammianus greatly elaborated this affair over

and above other incidences of barbarian raiding in Britain and elsewhere.[108] Ammianus'

account certainly approached panegyric; indeed, Theodosius is praised as *dux nominis incluti,*

animi vigore collecto 'a leader of a renowned name, filled with courageous vigour'.[109] If

Ammianus was guilty of over-praising Theodosius' personal qualities, lauding his

subjugation of the enemy and his restoration of towns and forts, this account nevertheless

provides us with an important counterpoint to his (hypothetical) description of the barbaric

Britons.

Here, Ammianus adopts a sympathetic attitude towards the provincials, claiming

Theodosius brought: *versis turbatisque Britannorum fortunis opem maximam*, 'the greatest

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[107] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 27.8.1-3.

[108] W. H. C. Frend, 'Pagans, Christians, and 'the Barbarian Conspiracy' of A. D. 367 in Roman Britain',
Britannia 23 (1992) 121-31, at 129; R. S. O. Tomlin, 'The Date of the "Barbarian Conspiracy"', *Britannia* 5
(1974), 303-9, at 305-7; Bartholomew, 'Fourth-Century Saxons', 177, 180-1; Drinkwater, 'Ammianus', pp. 118-
19.

[109] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 28.3.1.

aid to the troubled and confused fortunes of the Britons'.[110] Ammianus, then, could depict

provincial societies, perhaps with tongue firmly in cheek as barbaric; however, he could also

sympathise with the plight of fellow provincials, depicting Theodosius' mission as an act of

liberation and a salvation for the beleaguered Britons. Therefore while Ammianus' account in

all likelihood contained stereotypical images of the Britons as a barbarian people – which

perhaps more properly 'belonged' to the Picts – he did not adopt a wholly negative attitude

towards the provincials; rather, like the anonymous Panegyric of Constantius, he lamented

their affliction and celebrated their relief. Nonetheless, Britain's marginality to the Roman

world is apparent in Ammianus' account: situated on the confines of the known world, the

island acted as a place of exile, a haven for malcontents and a crucible for rebellion and

diocese under threat from barbarian incursions.

Despite writing in the reign of Theodosius the Great, and, so it seems, praising his

father's action in Britain, Ammianus did not write for the imperial court. Nor did he recount

more recent imperial history. The fortunes of Britain post-Ammianus are, then, from a

literary perspective uncertain. To help understand Britain's role in events post-Hadrianople

(378) and subsequent to the reign of Theodosius the Great (d. 395), we must turn to the

material emanating from the imperial court in the reign of Honorius (395-423), the son of

Theodosius the Great.

Claudian and the Honorian Court

Here, our main source is the poems of Claudian, court poet to Stilicho and Honorius.

Claudius Claudianus appears to have been born in Alexandria, Roman Egypt, sometime in

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[110] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 28.3.1.

the mid- to late-fourth century.[111] As a centre of Greek learning, Alexandria, alongside the

equally prominent city of Thebes, produced an assortment of poets and scholars throughout

the imperial period; poets who in general conceived and produced works in Greek. Early

fragments of Claudian's work, and his own testimony, suggest that Claudian followed the

same pattern as his contemporaries. However, from the early fourth century, Latin emerged in

Egypt as a language of administration, and smatterings of Egyptian poets writing in or

familiar with Latin works, notably the *Aeneid*, suggest that knowledge of Latin was not

confined to the mundane.[112] It is within this broader context of the development of Latin in

the Greek east that we should place Claudian; however, the extent and skill to which he

wielded the Latin language suggests an outstanding talent, the product of an expensive

education limited to the upper echelons of society, whose family ambition may have had

designs on an imperial career for the young poet.

Seeking position in western imperial society, Claudian gravitated to Rome where he

found employment with the Anicii – one of the most powerful senatorial families in Italy –

celebrating through panegyric Probinus' and Olybrius' control of the consulship of 395.[113]

Claudian's talent eventually brought him to the attention of the imperial court, where he

began by his role of court panegyrist for the western emperor Honorius and Stilicho, his

magister militum, where he produced fifteen major panegyrics and a number of shorter verses

until his death in A.D. 404. Though praising Honorius, Claudian appears to have been an

advocate for Stilicho's ambition; Alan Cameron noting how *Panegyricus De Tertio*

Consulatu Honorii Augusti works to establish Stilicho's claim, supposedly bequeathed at

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[111] This paragraph draws extensively on A. Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Politics at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 1-45.

[112] Cameron, *Claudian*, pp. 15-20.

[113] Cameron, *Claudian*, pp. 30-1.

Theodosius' deathbed, to be regent of both Honorius and his brother Arcadius, the eastern emperor.[114]

Claudian's poems dealt with a range of subjects, notably the relationship of the imperial court, now located permanently in Ravenna, with the outlying provinces of the western empire. However, his educational background, literary influences, location at the 'centre of civilisation' and the expectations of his audience coloured his perception of these regions causing him to perpetuate established prejudices ingrained within Roman society. This has particular ramifications for Britain. As illustrated in *De Consulatu Stilichonis Liber Secundus*, where abstract personifications of the western provinces thanked Stilicho for freeing them from various threats, foreign and domestic, Claudian depicted Britain as a barbarous island. In one sense, Britain appears no different from the other provinces as an integral part of the western Empire, all of whom owed their liberty and prosperity, according to Claudian, to Stilicho. However, Claudian's imagery, though evocative, was not necessarily complimentary to her provincial inhabitants:

> *Inde Caledonio velata Britannia monstro, ferro picta genas, cuius vestigia verrit*
>
> *caerulus Oceanique aestum mentitur amictus.*[115]

> Then [spoke] Britain wrapped in the skin of some Caledonian monster, her cheeks
>
> tattooed, and azure clothing rivalling the surge of Ocean, sweeping to her feet.

Here, Claudian personifies Britain as a Caledonian monster, replete with tattoos and clothed in the skin of wild beasts. Gone is the sense that this is an island province, inhabited by provincials; instead we have a return to the Tacitean image perpetuated by Dio and Herodian where Britain and the Britons were exemplified by the Caledonii of the far north; indeed, the

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[114] Cameron, *Claudian*, pp. 41-5.

[115] Claudian, *De Consulatu Stilichonis Liber Secundus*, 247-9.

Britons once again are the 'painted people'. While this description was meant to appeal to poetic aristocratic sensibilities, it nonetheless perhaps reveals wider assumptions regarding Britain's civility that suggest Roman audiences were familiar with Britain's classification as a barbaric place.

Britain's marginality is further emphasised when compared with Claudian's depictions in the same poem of the other western provinces: while Spain, Gaul, Africa and Italy are also personified, for Claudian these regions provided the empire with, respectively, olives, warriors, wheat and wine.[116] Britain's contribution to the empire was skin-clad, tattooed barbarians! Hardly an endorsement. Claudian's physical description of the Britons appears to rely on similarly antiquated images concerning barbarians and their appearance: 'Britannia's monstrous size clearly an indication of her barbarous nature; indeed, during *De Consulatu Stilichonis Liber Tertius* Claudian refers to *magna taurorum fracturae colla Britannae* 'Britons that can break the backs of great bulls'.[117] Here, the Britons are listed alongside 'shaggy Cretans' and 'bay, slender, Spartans'; the connection between the three peoples is not at all obvious, and may be due to the requirements of rhyme and metre as the next line mentions a certain Britomartis. Hugeness in strength and stature were nevertheless common descriptions of barbarian peoples: Tacitus, indeed, had remarked on the appeareance of the Caledonian Britons:

> …*namque rutilae Caledoniam habitantium comae, magni artus Germanicam originem adserverant.*[118]

> …in the case of the inhabitants of Caledonia, their red-gold hair and massive limbs proclaim German origin.

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[116] Claudian, *De Consulatu Stilichonis Liber Secundus*, 230-46, 256-68.

[117] Claudian, *De Consulatu Stilichonis Liber Tertius*, 301.

[118] Tacitus, *Agricola*, 11.2.

In some respects, Claudian was heir to the Tacitean 'vision of Britannia' where the island was personified by the inhabitants of Caledonia. Within imperial circles, then, the depiction of Britons constructed in the early fourth century as liberated Romans seems extremely distant. As Honorius sat ensconced at Ravenna, the distance in physical and cognitive terms between the imperial court and Britain cannot but have worsened perceptions of the island diocese. What is more, it should cause no surprise that similar views were circulating contemporaneously amongst the southern Gallic aristocracy, a group who continually held the Britons in low regard. Here, the poetry of Rutilius Namatianus, who had served Honorius as *magister officiorum* and *praefectus urbis* between around 412-14, illuminates contemporary attitudes. During the lengthy *De Reditu Suo*, composed around 416, Rutilius praises his friend Victorinus, formerly *Vicarius Britanniarum*, for his time spent amongst the Britons:

> *conscius Oceanus virtutum, conscia Thule et quaecumque ferox arva Britannus arat...*[119]

> Well did Ocean know his excellence, well did Thule know them, and all the land
> the wild Briton ploughs…

Given that Rutilius was educated in the classical tradition, such antiquated descriptions may have fallen naturally from his pen. What is most striking, however, is that this description was aimed at an experienced statesman with first-hand knowledge of the Britons; yet it was still possible to describe the inhabitants as *ferox Britannus*. Probably such a sentiment embodied southern Gallic attitudes towards the island and her populace. Whilst it is quite clear that this statement must refer to the citizens under Victorinus' control, it was perfectly acceptable to describe this population as 'wild' in their behaviour. Claudian had also

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[119] Rutilius Namatianus, *De Reditu Suo*, trans. J. W. Duff and A. M. Duff, *Minor Latin Poets* (Cambridge Mass., 1934), line 500, pp. 753-830.

described the Gauls as *ferox*, though this referred to their martial qualities, not their general deportment. On the other hand, the Britons were merely agricultural workers of low-status. Yet reference to the Britons ploughing suggests that Britain had improved under the Romans; gone was the image of them as pastoralists, though to certain extent even Caesar had recognised that some *civitates* in Britain were agriculture. It is nonetheless quite clear how the Gauls regarded the Britons: this was a low status provincial people. At the centre of Roman government, then, an attitude appears to have been shared amongst imperial elites that the Britons were barbarians in all but name, their island the home of skin-clad monsters and peasant labourers.

In fact, within the poetry of Claudian there is perhaps a return to the attitude displayed on the gaming-boards from Trier and Rome that (some) Britons were an imperial enemy:

> *Nec stetit Oceano remisque ingressa profundum vincendos alio quaesivit in orbe*
> *Britannos.*[120]

> Nor did Ocean stand in her way; having advanced upon the deep, she sought in
> another world for Britons to vanquish.

Here, Claudian is describing the Roman conquest of Europe and the Mediterranean. However, it is still useful in showing that the Britons were, in some senses, locked into the perennial role as a conquered people – this was to be their legacy within Roman poetical and historical works. The use of *alius orbis* harks back to the early imperial period when Britain was deemed 'another world'. Yet as our discussion of Ammianus indicates, this cultural repertoire was shared by both poets and historians across the early and late imperial periods; indeed, literary images of Britain and the Britons remained persistent throughout the Roman domination of Western Europe. Certainly, Claudian's use of the gerundive *vincendos*, 'to be

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[120] Claudian, *De Consulatu Stilichonis Tertius*, 148-9.

vanquish' recalls the sentiment displayed on the Rome/Trier gaming-boards, where the Briton is also *victus* 'vanquished'. Ambiguity towards Britain's status is, moreover, hinted at during *De Bello Gothico*, where in a speech placed into the mouth of Stilicho, the *magister militum* addresses the assembled troops:

> *Credite nunc omnes quas dira Britannia gentes, quas Hister, quas Rhenus alit, pendere paratas in speculis.*[121]
>
> Think at this time all the fierce peoples of Britain, the Danube, and Rhine are watching and stand ready.

The Rhine and Danube were of course well known to contemporaries as forming the boundary between Empire and *barbaricum*. The populations beyond that point were indeed *gentes*, barbarian enemies of Rome. Britain also, apparently, had its *gentes*; while this may refer to the Picts and Scots, there is no clear indication in this poem that the *gentes* of Britain are not various 'tribes' of *Britanni*. Certainly, Claudian gives no indication that a line of demarcation between Roman and barbarian existed within Britain. Perhaps Britain and the lands and peoples beyond the Rhine and Danube were linked by Claudian as entities beyond a watery barrier; might then courtly Roman audiences considered the entirety of Britain to be populated by hostile and barbarous peoples?

Britain's place in the empire, and indeed the status of her inhabitants amongst the provincial peoples is elucidated further in the composition *De Bello Gildonico* (*c*. 398), which recounts the war with the African 'pirate' (*praedo*) Gildo.[122] Despite Claudian's disparaging remark, Gildo was a figure of note, originally entrusted with command over

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[121] Claudian, *De Bello Gothico*, 568-70.

[122] Claudian, *De Bello Gildonico*, 162.

North Africa by Theodosius and probably holding the position of *comes Africae*.[123] Seduced into open rebellion from the Honorian regime by the eastern imperial court, headed by the eunuch Eutropius, Gildo had refused to supply grain to Italy, thereby causing severe shortages and discontent within the eternal city. Indeed, according to Claudian, Roma was so weak that she was forced to supplicate herself before the gods at Olympus; however, this meek behaviour was most uncharacteristic of Roma, and totally at odds with her attitude towards subject peoples: *non solito vultu nec qualis iura Britannis* 'not with such countenance does she assign laws to the Britons'.[124] Fulfilling their traditional role as a people subject to Rome, the Britons are represented by Claudian as an exemplar of a barbarian people requiring the civilising mission of Roman imperialism, cowering under Roma's domineering glare. Interestingly, Claudian appears to be utilising imagery deployed originally by Seneca during the aftermath of the Roman invasion of A.D. 43, which suggested that the emperor Claudius had supplied the Britons with 'new laws' (*nova iura*).[125]

Although reference to earlier works was standard poetical convention for Claudian could there have been additional, contemporary reasons for associating the Britons with lawlessness – that is, was this merely Claudian's re-use of conventional imagery, or were contemporary issues behind these references to the Briton's apparent non-conformity? In order to engage with these questions, we must examine the political circumstances affecting late Britain. Ammianus, as we have seen, suggested that Britain was afflicted by barbarian incursions in the late fourth century, and the restoration of the island and her provincials was a matter of celebration.[126] Claudian paints a similarly bleak picture of Britain's fortunes in the latter stages of the fourth century and the early years of the fifth century. As noted above,

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[123] J. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A. D. 364-425* (Oxford, 1975), p. 179.

[124] *De Bello Gildonico*, 19.

[125] Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis*, ed. P. T. Eden (Cambridge, 1984), 12.3.13-18.

[126] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 20.1; 26.5.

during *De Consulatu Stilichonis Liber Secundus* Britain's personification had thanked Stilicho for destroying the barbarians threatening her shores – that is, the Picts, Scots and Saxons.[127] Likewise during *In Eutropium*, the goddess Roma, celebrating the extent of Honorius' authority relates how Britain is secure from the barbarian threat:

> *Quantum te principe possim, non longinqua docent, domito quod Saxone Tethys*
>
> *mitior aut fracto secura Britannia Picto.*[128]

> Examples near at hand testify to the extent of my power now art thou emperor.
> The Saxon is conquered and Tethys safe; the Picts have been defeated and Britain
> is secure.

Here, Britain is regarded as an imperial possession: recovery of this peripheral diocese an important and illustrious deed which illustrated the (supposed?) reach of Honorius' power. However, Claudius' portrayal of one of the most notorious events in later fourth-century Britain may suggest the presence of a more ambivalent attitude existing toward Britain at the imperial court. As we have seen, Ammianus presented Theodosius' mission to Britain in order to quell the 'barbarian conspiracy' as an act of liberation for the stricken provincials; however, *Panegyricus De Quarto Consulatu Honorii Augusti* presents a rather more ambiguous picture of Britain and her status within the Roman empire. In an extended passage recounting the heroic actions of Honorius' grandfather Theodosius in restoring order to the empire, Claudian offers his own interpretation of Theodosius' response to the infamous *barbarica conspiratio*:

> *Caledoniis posuit qui castra pruinis, qui medios Libyae sub casside pertulit aestus, terribilis*
>
> *Mauro debellatorque Britanni litoris ac pariter Boreae vastator et Austri.*[129]

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[127] Claudian, *De Consulatu Stilichonis Liber Secundus*, 247-55.

[128] Claudian, *In Eutropium*, 391-3.

He who fixed camp in the frosts of Caledonia, who beneath his helmet bore the heat of a

Libyan summer, terror of the Moors, conqueror of Britain's coast and in a like manner

ravager of the North and South.

Claudian subsequently commends the elder Theodosius for destroying the Picts, Scots and

Saxons, representing the incident as the purge of barbarian blood by a victorious Roman

general. His use, however, of *debellator*, 'conqueror', and *vastator*, 'ravager', in regards to

the North and South of Britain are perhaps more reminiscent of an account of the subjugation

of enemy territory, rather than the liberation of a stricken province; certainly this appears at

odds with Ammianus' depiction of Theodosius' restoration of towns and forts. As befitting a

court panegyric, the martial aspects of Theodosius' campaign were naturally accentuated by

Claudian, who wished to depict the grandfather of the Emperor in the most glowing terms as

possible.

Nevertheless, this was seemingly Ammianus' motive also. As a former *protector* such

military matters was of undoubted interest to Ammianus;[130] indeed, it would seem that

Claudian had gleaned the details of Theodosius' African campaign from the pages of *Res

Gestae*, indicating that the circumstances of his British expedition were perhaps similarly

familiar to the poet.[131] Whether the case or not, Claudian's description of the ravaging of

Britain offers no distinction between province and *barbaricum*, and may even suggest to

audiences with only a limited familiarity with the distant provinces that Britain, and her

inhabitants, the Britons, were hostile to the Roman state. Britain's status was as a theatre of

war, one in which conquest and ravaging were acceptable forms of political action.

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[129] Claudian, *Panegyricus De Quarto Consulatu Honorii Augusti*, 28-34.

[130] F. Trombley, 'Ammianus Marcellinus and fourth-century warfare: a *protector*'s approach to historical narrative' in Hunt and Drijvers (eds.), *Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*, pp.17-28.

[131] Cameron, *Claudian*, pp. 331-2.

<u>Tyranny and Barbarity</u>

To this juncture, we have attempted to argue that the Britons occupied an undistinguished position in the Roman hierarchy of peoples, exemplified by the long-term propagandist depiction of the Britons as barbarian enemies of the Roman state. This unfortunate position was compounded by the marginality of the province and the inability of the Britons to assert themselves in the highest echelons of Roman senatorial society. These circumstances alone, however, fail to account entirely for the depiction of Britain circulating in the Honorian court in the late fourth/early fifth century. In order to fully comprehend imperial attitudes towards Britain in this period, we must examine recent imperial history from the perspective of the Honorian regime, as related by Claudian.

The exploits of imperial ancestors against barbarians in distant islands were, however, but one supplementary reason for Claudian's depiction of Britain as a barbaric and potentially hostile island. For the Honorian regime, indeed, a far more virulent threat to the stability of the imperial government emerged from within Britain at this time, namely usurpers. Britain, as discussed above, had been periodically wrenched from the clutches of the centralised imperial government, producing with almost regular convulsions a series of several, mostly failed claimants, for the imperial throne. This would have been known to Claudius from his familiarity with Ammianus, who had reported the actions of a certain Pannonian exile who had attempted to ferment rebellion amongst exiles and soldiery during Theodosius' campaign of 368-9.[132] Indeed, by the latter stages of the fourth century there must have been a considerable awareness at the imperial court of Britain's propensity for rebellion; and one of the most recent and significant to emerge from the island, that of Magnus Maximus, coloured the Honorian regime's perception of Britain.

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[132] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 28.3.3-6.

As noted above, Magnus Maximus had fallen foul of Ausonius for slaying Gratian, Ausonius pupil and the legitimate western emperor in 383. The Theodosians were personally acquainted with Maximus, a fellow Spaniard who had perhaps accompanied the elder Theodosius on his British campaign of 368-9. However, Maximus has also been identified tentatively as the *dux* of that name mentioned by Ammianus as serving on the Danube *limes* during the 370s.[133] Maximus' subsequent appearance in Britain may lend credence to the notion that his rebellion originated from his dissatisfaction at his British posting and the favour shown by Gratian to Theodosius the Younger (later emperor), who was given command of Illyricum, perhaps the most politically important region of the empire.[134] However, Orosius reports that Maximus' assumption of the purple occurred at the behest of the army in Britain.[135] Whatever the case, Maximus moved to gain control of Gaul, confronting the emperor, Gratian, who, abandoned by his general, Merobaudes, was slain at Lyon on 25 August, 383 by Maximus' subordinate Andragathius.[136]

As with previous usurpers, Maximus desperately sought legitimacy and attempted to curry favour with both the boy-emperor Valentinian II, brother of the deceased Gratian who controlled Italy, as well as Maximus' eastern counterpart, Theodosius, father of Honorius and Arcadius. As Matthews has noted, Maximus may have hoped to a reach a concord with Theodosius having previously served his father while simultaneously hoping to subdue Valentinian by either force or diplomacy.[137] Preoccupied with negotiations with the Persian ruler Shapur III and an invasion of Thrace by the Greuthungi, finally in 386 Theodosius

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[133] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 31.4.9; Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 95-6.

[134] Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 95-6.

[135] Orosius, *Historia adversum paganos*, 7.34.9-10.

[136] Zosimus, 4.35.2-6.

[137] Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, p. 176.

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recognised Maximus' position, acknowledging the consulship of his praetorian prefect Fl. Euodius.

This situation did not prevail and with the existence of two western imperial courts – those of Maximus and Valentinian II – problems eventually came to a head with Maximus invading Italy in 387. Maximus' escalation of hostilities demonstrates the vulnerability of his position: he needed to expunge the empire of his rival, Valentinian, in order to fully control western financial and military resources. Perhaps most importantly, Maximus realised that unless he gained control of the eastern portion of the western empire, his flank would be permanently threatened by an alliance between Italy and Constantinople. This move, however, was fatal for Maximus, inciting Theodosius into an invasion of the West which very quickly resulted in Maximus' death at Aquileia on the 28 August, 388.[138] Whatever Theodosius' motivations for slaying Maximus, the significance of this event for the Theodosian dynasty was enormous, resulting in their control of the eastern and western portions of the empire; the hapless Valentinian II, having being packed off to Gaul surrounded by Theodosius' cronies, eventually committing suicide in May 392. This, however, resulted in yet another usurper being raised to the purple in the West, this time the unlucky candidate being the rhetorician Eugenius, the puppet emperor of the general Arbogast. Eugenius eventually went the way of Maximus, being put to death following the defeat of his armies by Theodosius at the Battle of Frigidus (A.D. 394).[139] Theodosius died the next year (A.D. 395) and the empire was partitioned between his sons, Honorius in the West and Arcadius in the East.

As might be expected, Theodosius' conflict with Maximus was recalled in political rhetoric emanating from the western imperial court during the *imperium* of Honorius (395-

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[138] Orosius, 7.35.4.

[139] Orosius, 7.35.15-22; M. Kulikowski, Barbarians in Gaul, Usurpers in Britain, *Britannia* 31 (2000), 325-45.

423). While Maximus is not referred to by name, there can be no doubt that within

Panegyricus De Quarto Consulatu Honorii Augusti the lines *hunc saeva Britannia fudit*,

'fierce Britain hurled out this one' are an invective against the failed usurper.[140] Moreover,

this sentiment elucidates Claudius' attitude, and presumably that of the imperial court, toward

Britain as a tyrant-producing island, a significant statement in later, insular scholarship

concerned with the Britons.[141] For our purposes, it is Claudius' use of the adjective *saeva*

'fierce/wild' to qualify the noun *Britannia* that signals the barbaric qualities of the island:

while Claudius and his audience knew of Maximus' Spanish origins, these lines imply it was

the island which was responsible for the creation of Maximus' tyrannical behaviour.

The association between tyranny and barbarity is further accentuated when compared

with two of the other usurpers of the period noted by Claudian, Eugenius and Rufinus.

Eugenius, rather than being 'produced' through proximity to a barbaric place was corrupted

into tyranny by the *Germanus exul*, 'German exile', Arbogast.[142] That Arbogast's Germanic

ethnicity identity – as opposed to his role as an officer of the emperor Theodosius – was

stressed in the poem suggests that Claudian intended to make explicit the causal link between

tyranny and barbarity. Likewise, the defamation of Rufinus, the praetorian prefect of the east,

establishes the links between barbarous behaviour and tyrannical aspirations. Rufinus was not

strictly a tyrant in the sense that he never claimed the purple for himself, but rather hoped to

control the east through Honorius' brother, Arcadius. His rivalry with Stilicho, however,

meant that he was cast in these terms by Claudian, where during *In Rufinum Liber Secundus*,

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[140] Claudian, *Panegyricus De Quarto Consulatu Honorii Augusti*, 72-4.

[141] See Chap. 4.

[142] Claudian, *Panegyricus De Quarto Consulatu Honorii Augusti*, 74.

Rufinus is described as *tyrannus*.[143] Again, it is certain types of behaviour or association as presented by Claudian which denote tyrant status:

> *Ipse inter medios, ne que de parte relinquat barbariem, revocat fulvas in pectora pelles frenaque…insignemque habitum Latii mutare coactae maerent captivae pellito iudice leges*.[144]

> Rufinus himself in their midst drapes tawny skins of beasts about his breast (through his barbarity)…Roman law, obliged to change her noble garment, mourns her slavery to a skin-clad judge.

Whether or not Rufinus truly garbed himself in skins matters not. For Claudian's audience, however, the act of assuming barbarian clothing meant that the *tyrannus* Rufinus was subjecting Roman freedom to barbarian captivity. Indeed, a thread connects these tyrannies: just as Rufinus was a skin-clad judge so too was Britain was a skin-clad island. Claudian's audience cannot have failed to notice the resemblance. Tyranny and barbarity went hand-in-hand; tyrants existed beyond the confines of civilisation and were, to Claudian at least, the result of contact with barbarism, whether in terms of people, places or behaviour. Rufinus and Eugenius were brought to a state of barbarity-tyranny through personal choice and the influence of men; Maximus became tyrannical through association with a geographical location, highlighting Britain's lack of civility.

The general presentation of the Britons in Claudian's poem, and the lack of distinction between *provincia* and *barbaricum* which appear to exist within Claudian's mind (and therefore his audiences), indicates that Britain was conceived as a wild and savage place, the theatre of rebellion and warfare; indeed, such were the island's qualities that it produced

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[143] Claudian, *In Rufinum Liber Secundus*, 268, 390.

[144] Claudian, *In Rufinum Liber Secundus*, 79-85.

barbarity within those that lingered there too long. If this could happen to a Roman officer, then must not the inhabitants of the island been considered as such from the outset?

The connection between the Honorian court, tyranny and Britain was not finalised on the death of Maximus, however; and although no surviving imperial panegyric remains to shed light on events, the usurpers Marcus, Gratian and Constantine III, who emerged in Britain during 406-7 represented a continuation in Britain's role within the empire. It was Constantine III who posed the threat to Honorius, crossing the Narrow Sea and gaining control of Gaul and Spain.[145] While Constantine III was unsuccessful, it is likely that his usurpation and perhaps the brief tyrannies of Marcus and Gratian contributed to Jerome's claim that *Britannia fertilis provincia tyrannorum*, 'Britannia is a province fertile of tyrants'.[146]

In 409, Britain was faced by barbarian incursions. Due to the inability of Constantine III to protect them, the provincials rebelled against the now legitimate emperor's regime and, according to the Greek historian Zosimus, 'reverted to their native customs'.[147] From this point, Britain passed out of imperial control though the Britons on occasion tried to revive their status as an imperial people. Indeed, it may have been only the next year when the so-called Honorian Rescript was possibly directed to Britain in response to the beleagured Britons pleas for aid in the face of renewed barbarian attack.[148] Later, the appeal to Aëtius contained within Gildas suggests that the some Britons were aware of their status as former provincials and appealed on this basis. Indeed, some Britons may have still felt themselves to have been part of the empire, despite the absence of direct imperial control. Certainly if the

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[145] Orosius, *Historia Adversum paganos*, 7.40.4.

[146] Jerome, *Ep.* 133.9.

[147] Zosimus, 5.2-3.

[148] For the Honorian Rescript, which may have been directed towards Bruttium, Italy, not Britain, see Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 41-2; Birley, *Roman Government of Britain*, pp. 461-2, favours Bruttium.

Honorian Rescript was directed towards Britain then it may have been the case that the empire, perhaps as a temporary measure at the time, abandoned the island diocese, intending to recover it when possible only for other events, in particular issues with the Goths, Vandals and other barbarian groups, to overwhelm the western provincial heartlands of southern Gaul and Italy.[149] In any case, there can be no doubt that these pleas went unanswered and, eventually, Anglo-Saxon identities prevailed in eastern and southern Britain.

Britain's reputation as a marginal, barbaric place and its relationship with Rome persisted into the fifth century, albeit in different form. Both imperial court and Catholic authorities were involved, although the vitriol came from Jerome, again, and other ecclesiastics who sought to denigrate the Christian instructor Pelagius through associating him with Britain, and indeed Ireland.[150] Pelagianism is the name given to the teachings of Pelagius, a doctrine condemned as heretical for its denial of original sin and that mortal will was capable of choosing between good and evil without divine aid. Without becoming bogged down in the theological details, it is evident that the Catholic elite, particularly those of southern Gaul, viewed Pelagianism was seen as a peculiarly British deviancy. Prosper of Aquitaine, for instance, declaring that a certain Agricola, son of bishop Severianus had corrupted the British church with Pelagianism.[151]

The battle between Catholics and Pelagians in Britain was recounted by Constantius in his *Vita Sancti Germani*, written in the 470s, which told of the visits of St Germanus of Auxerre to the island, extoling the saint for his triumph over the Pelagian party as well as his

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[149] T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Rome and the Britons, 400-664', in T. M. Charles-Edwards and R. J. W. Evans (eds.), *Wales and the Wider World: Welsh History in an International Context* (Donington, 2010), pp. 9-27, at, pp. 10-11. See also the classic comment by): 'It was not Britain that gave up Rome, but Rome that gave up Britain.'

[150] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 193-99.

[151] Prosper, *Epitoma Chronicon*, *s.a.* 429, ed. T. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, i. 472 (Berlin, 1961).

victory over the Picts and Scots.[152] Britain's place as a sanctuary or haven for Pelagianism was obviously a concern for the Catholic hierarchy and there can be little doubt that Pelagianism had found adherents in Britain. As Prosper acknowledged, Pope Celestine had been fervent in his efforts to free Britain of the 'disease', keeping the island Catholic while at the same time endeavouring to convert the Irish.[153] It might be assumed on the basis of Prosper and Constantius's testimony that Britain was gripped by Pelagianism and adherents of this view dominated British society, particularly in southern central Britain. However, while some exiles may have returned to the island and established the 'heresy' within Britain, we might be justified in doubting the popularity of Pelagianism throughout the island. It was certainly in Prosper and Constantius' interests, respectively, to make Pope Celestine and Germanus' achievements greater than they were; Prosper possibly exaggerating the Pelagian threat in Britain in order to increase the power and influence of the Gallic church.

While the evidence suggests that Pelagians resided in Britain and that Pelagius himself had been born in the island, these accounts can perhaps be viewed as part of a longer tradition within Gallic society of denigrating the Britons. It is unlikely, for example, that Pelagius put any great store in any supposed ethnic identity as a Briton: in the recruitment of adherents, to which he was initially successfully and therefore a problem, it was his spiritual status and teachings that counted, not his origins. It is probable, then, that reference to Pelagius' identity as a Briton, or in Jerome's case that Pelagius was a 'porridge-sodden Irishmen', derive from an attempt to 'other' Pelagius in Catholic circles, thereby depriving him of legitimacy. From a Catholic perspective, some form of intervention seems to have

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[152] Constantius, *Vita S. Germani*, ed. W Levison, MGH SRM 7, 285-83. For the debate on Constantius' *vita* and the possible visits of Germanus to Britain, see Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 49-50, who regards the two visits as factual; *contra* A. Barrett, 'Saint Germanus and the British Missions', *Britannia* 40 (1999), 197-220, who argues for one visit.

[153] See Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 182.

been required in Britain; however, it should be kept in mind that the extent of the problem could have been over-inflated to embellish the achievements of both Celestine and Germanus. On the other hand, observers from Rome or southern Gaul might have regarded Pelagianism as yet another symptom of the Briton's well established barbarism, now taking a new and more threatening form; with British religious deviancy now the subject of Gallic contempt. Indeed, viewed in their broader historiographical and literary context, the attitudes of the Catholic Gauls seem remarkably similar to those held by their imperial predecessors, men such as Tacitus and Ausonius.

Conclusion

The place and role of Britain and the Britons in the Roman empire was one of marginality. Geographically, the island stood beyond Ocean at the ends of the earth and her peripheral status was reflected in the island's role as a place of exile, political discontent, manifest in the numerous usurpers which arose within her shores, and religious deviancy. Much of the vitriol directed towards the island resulted from Britain's peripheral status and the conservatism of Roman ethnographic models, which resulted in the continuation of a 'vision of *Britannia'* that accentuated the barbaric qualities of the island and her inhabitants, even to the extent of personifying the island as a tattooed Caledonian beast; indeed, the perpetuation of the Caledonians as the barbaric Britons *par excellence* continued beyond their transformation into a Pictish *gens*, a circumstance which reveals both the disinclination of continental observers to alter their perceptions of marginal peoples and the inflexibilities of ethnography in creating descriptions of new peoples.

Placed within the wider circumstance of their position as an imperial people, the peripheral status of Britain and its geographic and cognitive distance from the imperial court meant that Britons never achieved positions within Roman society attained by their

counterparts in Gaul and elsewhere. To a large extent, this must be the result of the infrequent visits of the imperial court to Britain, a circumstance which prevented the rise of a fully integrated imperial aristocracy. However, we must also allow for colonial discourse and the 'othering' of the Britons as having a detrimental effect on their attainment of imperial positions, as evidenced in Ausonius' retort to the British poet, Silvius Bono.

What is more, the effects of several failed usurpations which originated in Britain perhaps further worsened the chances of Britons attaining positions of significance within the imperial hierarchies. Nonetheless, the third and fourth centuries were fundamental to the creation of insular, provincial Britishness: the demarcation of Roman territory, the advent of the Pictish terminology and their earlier acquisition of citizen status meant that the provincial Britons could categorically distinguish themselves from the extramural barbarians, Pictish or otherwise.

Britishness remained, however, a social construct diffused through shared ideals and, perhaps literary culture which required perpetuation amongst its adherents. In the east, this construct eventually failed as barbarian culture and identities prevailed over earlier identities. In the west of the island, Britishness remained, though as we shall see, this also required cultivation amongst regional groups to maintain its potency. It is to this matter we now turn.

Introduction

As shown in a previous chapter, the concept of Roman period Britishness was defined by two principal factors: the construction of territorial, diocesan *Britannia* and citizenship. These factors had insular and 'international' significance by defining the *Britanni* as an imperial people distinct from the Pictish barbarians beyond the frontier and as citizens of a universal empire. This chapter, through an examination of the writings of Gildas and, to a lesser extent, Patrick, discusses how the conception of Britishness – embedded in notions of territoriality and citizenship – changed over the course of the fifth and sixth centuries as barbarian *gentes* encroached on Britain, Britain's place in the Roman empire became the subject of rhetorical and historical discourse and how a new factor, Christianity, became a defining feature of insular Britishness.

De Excidio Britanniae

Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* (*DEB*), 'The Ruin of Britain', remains one of the most important, if problematic, sources for the history and culture of late antique Britain.[1] Composed in the form of an *epistola*, Gildas sought in an open letter to castigate the moral and spiritual failings of his fellow countrymen, especially the kings and clergy, and point

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[1] History: C. E. Stevens, 'Gildas Sapiens', *EHR* 56 (1941), 333-73; R. W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain* (New York and London, 1966), pp. 44-62; E. A. Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain', *Britannia* 19 (1979), 203-26; N. J. Higham 'Gildas and "Agitius": A comment on De Excidio XX, 1', *BBCS* 40 (1993), 123-34; *idem*, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the fifth century* (Manchester, 1994), 7-29; I. McKee, 'Gildas: Lessons from History', *CMCS* 51 (Summer 2006), 1-36; K. George, *Gildas's* De Excidio Britonum *and the Early British Church* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 42-68. Woolf, 'Romans to Barbarians', pp. 351-2. Culture: M. Lapidge, 'Gildas's Education and the Latin Culture of sub-Roman Britain', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *GNA*, pp. 27-50; N. Wright, 'Gildas's Reading: a Survey', *Sacris Erudiri* 32 (1991), 121-62; *idem*, 'Did Gildas read Orosius?' *CMCS* 9 (Summer 1985), 31-42.

them subsequently to the path to salvation as the inhabitants of the *praesens Israel*.[2] While

therefore written as a reproof to their sinfulness, Gildas nevertheless delivered a sermon

which derived from the love of his people and homeland, striving to save rather than

condemn those he targeted for rebuke.[3] Gildas's purpose, it would seem, was providential,

aiming to reaffirm the place of his fellow Britons as God's select people – the new Israelites;

indeed, for Gildas his contemporaries stood at the crossroads of history, with two potential

outcomes to their present sinful condition: either repeat the mistakes of yesteryear and fall

headlong into the precipice, destroyed by the Babylonians – that is, the Saxons; or rediscover

the path of righteousness, which led to God's grace, free themselves from the barbarian

affliction, and resume their rightful position as the Chosen People of God.[4]

    Gildas thus cast himself in the role of both prophet and historian.[5] His *epistola* which

detailed the laxity of the current generation was therefore prefaced by an historical section,

the *historia*, which dealt with the history of Britain and her indigenous population – albeit in

a cursory manner – from the pre-Roman past, through the Roman conquest to the post-

Roman era and the subsequent arrival and rebellion of the Saxons, which sparked the 'War of

the Saxon Federates' in which Ambrosius Aurelianus rose to prominence.[6] Though subsided,

this conflict was a painful memory and Gildas feared that the present sinfulness of the

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[2] *DEB*, 26.1.

[3] *DEB*, 1.1.

[4] Hanning, *Vision of History*, pp. 44-62; John Morris: 'But Gildas did not write in vain. On the contrary, few books have had a more immediate and far-reaching impact that his. He uttered what tens of thousands felt', 'Historical Introduction' in *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and other works* (Chichester, 1978), p. 2; Jones, *End of Roman Britain*, pp. 139-40; D. Howlett, 'The Prophecy of Saxon Occupation in Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*', *Peritia* 16 (2002), 156-60 at 157; George, *Gildas*, pp. 9-13; A. Plassmann, 'Gildas and the Negative Image of the Cymry', *CMCS* 41 (Summer 2001), 1-15; N. J. Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London, 2002), pp. 46-58.

[5] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 203-4.

[6] *DEB*, 4-26.

Britons, which had been the cause of their departure from God's grace, would repeat itself and manifest in the final domination of the Saxons.

Modern commentators, however, have struggled with the definition of Gildas as an historian, pointing to the lack of chronological markers, named historical figures and seeming factual 'errors' within his work, most obviously his depiction of the construction of the northern Walls.[7] However, as illustrated by Charles-Edwards, we need not draw such a hard distinction between the role of prophet and historian: while modern readers and contemporary audiences familiar, for example, with Orosius might question Gildas's portrayal of recent imperial history, there can be little doubt that Gildas intended the *historia* to be accepted as a valid interpretation of Britain's past; indeed, just as the Bible was both historical and prophetical, so too was the framework which underpinned the *DEB*. Lessons from the past could thus be derived from historical precedent, particularly in terms of the afflictions laid upon the Britons through their sinfulness, and Gildas cast himself as a prophet in the vein of Samuel, Elijah and Elishah.[8] This historical framework, concerned with the past relationship between Britain's inhabitants and God, depicted almost overwhelmingly the forebears of Gildas's contemporary audience as sinful, lacking in morality, bravery and fidelity.[9] While, therefore, Gildas's work was a heartfelt and loving attempt at redirecting the errant ways of his contemporaries, Gildas's message was cutting in its delivery; Andrew Merrills stating, for example, that Gildas was 'far from sympathetic in his treatment of the [British] *gens*'.[10]

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[7] D. N. Dumville, 'The chronology of *De Excidio Britanniae*, Book I', in *GNA*, pp. 61-84; Plassmann, 'Negative Image', 1.

[8] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 203-4.

[9] Plassmann, 'Negative Image', 5-11; Higham, *Myth-Making and History*, pp. 46-58.

[10] A. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 288.

Gildas's concern for Britain and her indigenous inhabitants, her people or *gens*, has led Edward Thompson to describe Gildas's work as the first provincial history of the West.[11] Merrills has concluded, indeed, that 'with the composition of the *De Excidio Britanniae*, the *Brettones* found their historical voice' with this people taking 'centre stage' within Gildas's work.[12] Most scholars in fact agree that Gildas's audience were a group who defined themselves as 'the Britons' and that Gildas himself predominantly referred to his *gens* by this ethnonym. For instance Ian McKee has suggested that Gildas's terminology 'reinforced the tie between the people and the land: Britannia of the Britanni'.[13] Similarly, Alheydis Plassmann has claimed that the Britons as a people were the subject of Gildas's sermon.[14] On the other hand, Peter Turner has questioned the assumption that the kings addressed by Gildas necessarily adhered to an ethnic British identity, suggesting instead that unlike his contemporaries, who stressed a multiplicity of identities, Gildas had 'a profoundly, uncompromisingly, and even exaggeratedly ethnocentric identity' and wished others to adopt such a mentality.[15] In addition, Thompson, while regarding Gildas as the first provincial historian, remains doubtful that such a 'national' consciousness existed within insular society.[16]

Taken in a wider context, Gildas's 'national' history might nevertheless be seen as part of a broader genre of late antique and early medieval writing described by some historians as *origo gentis*.[17] Exemplified by such works as the *Getica*[18] of Jordanes and

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[11] E. A. Thompson, 'The History', 208.

[12] Merrills, *History and Geography*, p. 288. The term *Brettones* is drawn from Merrills' analysis of Bede; however Gildas never uses this variant of 'Britons'.

[13] McKee, 'Lessons from History', 4, n. 22.

[14] Plassmann, 'Negative Image', 5.

[15] P. Turner, 'Identity in Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*', *CMCS* 58 (Winter 2009), 29-48, at 47.

[16] Thompson, 'The History', 208.

[17] Wolfram, *Origo et Relgio*, 21-2.

Gregory of Tours' *Decem Libri Historiarum*,[19] both of which structured their narratives around particular dynasties, respectively, the Gothic Amali and Merovingian Franks, these works and others like them are regarded as central to the processes which witnessed the creation and formation of ethnic political units, *regna* and *gentes*, within the former Roman empire in the West. According to scholars such as Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl, these barbarian histories contained the *traditionskern*, 'kernel of tradition', the centuries-old, authentic oral traditions of the *gens*; cherished and nurtured by their kings, these traditions, which recalled the migration and deeds of the ancestral group, were remembered faithfully over many centuries and multiple generations, at last to be written down once these *gentes* had collided with, then integrated within, the Roman world.[20]

Whether such histories truly contained the oral traditions of their respective histories or, indeed, were concerned with the creation of a united *gens* remains a matter for debate.[21] Jordanes, for instance, although proclaiming himself a Goth and basing his work somewhat on an earlier Gothic history, written by the Italian senator Cassiodorus for the Ostrogothic king and ruler of Italy, Theoderic the Great (475-526), was resident in Constantinople and may have written either for Justinian or the outer circle of military and court officials.[22] Gregory of Tours' *Decem Libri Historiarum*, written *c.* 590, has meanwhile been interpreted as espousing a Christological concept of history, one in which the author's primary concern

[18] Iordanis, *Romana et Getica*, ed. T. Mommsen, MGH AA 5.1. (Berlin, 1882).

[19] Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, eds., B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH: SRM 1.1.

[20] Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 117-70; idem, *Origo et religio*, 19-38; W. Pohl, 'Memory, identity and power in Lombard Italy', in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 9-28.

[21] J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, 'Making a Gothic History: Does the *Getica* of Jordanes Preserve Genuinely Gothic Traditions?', *JLA* 4 (2011), 185-216; W. Goffart, 'Jordanes's *Getica* and the Disputed Authenticity of Gothic Origins from Scandinavia', *Speculum* 80 (2005), 379-98; idem, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 40-55, 56-72.

[22] B. Croke, 'Cassiodorus and the Getica of Jordanes', *Classical Philology* 82 (1987), 117-34; Amory, *People and Identity*, pp. 291-307.

was the relationship between bishop and king.[23] For Goffart the Christian elements of the *Histories* were paramount, rather than definitions of Roman or Frankish ethnicity.[24] Gregory may have in fact written in a period when stressing ethnic difference was no longer necessary, with all dwelling within the *regnum Francorum* classified as Franks; thus Gregory's concern was for the status and privilege of his own family and bishopric, with individuals recognised on the basis of rank rather than ethnicity.[25]

Whatever their precise function, it remains doubtful whether Gildas's work fits seamlessly alongside these other late antique and early medieval literary artifices. As the prophet of an indigenous, Christian population Gildas was certainly no 'barbarian historian' – indeed, he would have been appalled at such a description – and his text was no 'barbarian history'. Instead, he was an Old Testament prophet, urging his people to repentence and rediscovery of their position as God's Chosen *familia*. In this respect, Gildas strove to define his people as consciously different to other surrounding populations; he was concerned not in the slightest with the amalgamation of peoples; nor did he write in a society where intrusive barbarians had, yet, gained complete control in social and political spheres. Rather, Gildas's work might be more closely compared to that of Salvian of Marsaille who utilised Old Testament imagery by emphasising the threat by barbarians to a wicked people, and the contrast between pagans and morally bankrupted Christians.[26]

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[23] M. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, trans. C. Carroll (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 36-87.

[24] W. Goffart, 'Foreigners in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours', in *idem*, *Rome's Fall and After* (London, 1989), pp. 275-91, at p. 291.

[25] E. James, 'Gregory of Tours and the Franks', in A. C. Murray (ed.), *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History* (Toronto, 1998), pp. 51-66, at p. 53.

[26] On Salvian, see: I. N. Wood, 'Continuity or Calamity: the Constraints of Literary Models', Drinkwater and Elton (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul*, pp. 9-18, at, pp. 9-12.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to examine Gildas's conceptions of group identity within the *DEB* through an analysis of his language and terminology, particularly within the 'historical' section where terms such as *Britannia*, *patria* and *cives* form an important element within Gildas's vision of community.[27] Gildas's formulation of Britishness, it will be argued, was rooted in Christianity and defined, like Roman provincial Britishness, by citizenship and a sense of place. Unlike Roman period Britishness, however, insular citizenship for Gildas demarcated the Britons against all other *gentes*, whether barbarian Picts, Scots and Saxons or Christian Romans.

Gildas

Before proceeding to our main discussion, we must examine what we know of Gildas and the possible date at which he wrote the *DEB*. Much obscurity surrounds Gildas's personal identity: he was certainly an ecclesiastic, probably a deacon.[28] Of his background, little else can be said with certainty: his name, for instance, is derived from neither Brittonic nor Latin; it may be Gothic;[29] or associated with North Africa, where a certain Gildo appears as a late Roman official native.[30] Given the severe rebuke directed at his contemporaries, and particularly Maglocunus, whom Gildas appears to have known personally,[31] it may well have been wise for the author to have used a pseudonym when compiling his tract.

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[27] *Cives* appears in both Dumville, 'The Chronology', pp. 65, 67, 74n, 76, 78, 82) and Wright's (Gildas's Geographical Perspective', pp. 102, 104) though little effort is made to define what Gildas meant by this term: see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Introduction' in *idem* (ed.), *After Rome*, pp. 1-20 at p. 6, whose views are challenged below. For *patria*, which is discussed in greater detail below, see N. Wright, 'Gildas's Geographical Perspective: some problems', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *GNA*, pp. 85-106, at pp. 102-4; C. Daniell, 'The Geographical Perspective of Gildas', *Britannia* 25 (1994), 213-17.

[28] O. Chadwick, 'Gildas and the Monastic Order', *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1954), 78-80.

[29] G. Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur* (Oxford, 2012), p. 53.

[30] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 29.5.6; Orosius, 7.36.2.

[31] *DEB*, 33-36.

Gildas's date and place of birth are similarly difficult to establish; Gildas appears to claim that he was born in the year of the siege of *Mons Badonicus*, which occurred forty-three years and one month before he wrote the *DEB*.[32] The tenth-century *Annales Cambriae* ascribes the siege of Badon to 516, though it is difficult to reconcile this date with the information supplied by Gildas; consequently, scholars have placed Gildas's date of birth between around 450 to 500.[33] As for Gildas's place of birth, the eleventh-century Life of St Gildas written at the Breton abbey of Saint Gildas-de-Rhuis refers to Arecluta – Clydesdale in the kingdom of Alt Clut. The value of this testimony, however, is uncertain and recent comment argues for Arecluta as a scribal error for Arclid, 'a small, featureless place with no village' six miles north-east of Crewe.[34] As for his death, an obit for Gildas in the entry for AD 570 is supplied by the A and B texts of *Annales Cambriae*; recent discussion suggests this entry might be accepted in broad terms.[35] The A text of the *Annales Cambriae* has been dated by its latest entry to the tenth century. However, the earlier sections of *Annales Cambriae*, which contain notice of the death of several important Irish saints and ecclesiastics, appear to have derived from the so-called Chronicle of Ireland, which became contemporary in the late sixth century: between *c*. 560 and *c*. 740 the Chronicle of Ireland contained entries derived from an Ionan chronicle, themselves perhaps taken from an earlier Columban annal, which could have included Gildas's obit.[36] Nonetheless it is certain, and indeed significant, that Gildas's obit must have been included within the Chronicle of Ireland, due to its appearance in both the Annals of Ulster and at least one of the Clonmacnois group

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[32] *DEB*, 26; for an alternative reading, see I. N. Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain: Continental Evidence and Parallels', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *GNA*, pp. 1-25, at pp. 22-3.

[33] Wood, 'Continental Evidence', pp. 22-3; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 217.

[34] A. Breeze, 'Where Was Gildas Born?', *NH* 45 (80), 347-50, at 347.

[35] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 215-16.

[36] T. M. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* (Liverpool, 2006), i. 35-51.

of chronicles both of which descended from the parent chronicle. Thus, this obit demands respect.[37]

Given previous uncertainty about the entry in the *Annales Cambriae* and the corresponding broad range of dates supplied for Gildas's life, it is no surprise that a similarly large range of dates have been suggested for the compilation of the *DEB*. Ranging from between 479 and 484,[38] around 500,[39] or between 515 and 530.[40] While the absence of definite chronological markers means certainty in this matter is almost impossible, current orthodoxy suggests a date of composition around 545, principally due to the obit of Maelgwn Gwynedd, identified as Gildas's Maglocunus, in *Annales Cambriae* in the year 547; and Gildas's failure to mention the plague which struck the Roman world in the 540s, which, for the author, would be a perfect manifestation of God's anger.[41] However, David Woods has suggested that a passage in Gildas which refers to a dense cloud covering the entirety of Britain might refer to mystery cloud of 536-7 which was noted by contemporary observers such as Cassiodorus and John Lydus.[42] Taking this as a sign of divine anger, Gildas thus took up his pen and wrote the tract that he had left in abeyance for ten years. This, then, would account for Gildas's 'failure' to mention the plague of the 540s but also allow him to be a contemporary of Maelgwn Gwynedd. Accordingly, a date around 536-8 is accepted tentatively here for the compilation of the *DEB*.

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[37] C. Stancliffe, 'The thirteenth sermons attributed to Columbanus' in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 93–202, at pp. 179-80.

[38] Higham, *Gildas and Britain*, p. 141.

[39] D. N. Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *GNA*, pp. 51-60.

[40] T. D. O'Sullivan, *The* De Excidio *of Gildas: Its Authenticity and Date* (Leiden, 1978), p. 178.

[41] C. Stancliffe, 'The Thirteen Sermons Attributed to Columbanus and the Question of their authorship', in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, Studies in Celtic History, 17 (Woodbridge, 1997), 93-202, at 180; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 216.

[42] D. Woods, 'Gildas and the Mystery Cloud of 536-7', *Journal of Theological Studies* 61 (2010), 226-34, at 228-31.

The most extensive work concerned with Gildas's use of sources remains Neil Wright's 1991 study.[43] This is now complemented by Thomas O'Loughlin's study of Gildas's biblical passages.[44] Naturally, Gildas quoted extensively from the Bible, though he had access to other material such as classical Roman poetry, notably *The Aeneid*, and Romano-Christian authors such as Rufinus, Jerome and Orosius.[45] This is of course important for illustrating the literary culture of late antique western Britain; though Gildas himself stated that he had some difficulty in compiling his information:

> *quantum tamen potuero, non tam ex scriptis patriae scriptorumve monimentis,*
> *quippe quae, vel si qua fuerint, aut ignibus hostium exusta aut civium exilii classe*
> *longius deportata non compareant, quam transmarine relatione, quae crebris*
> *inrupta intercapedinibus non satis claret.*

> Nevertheless, I shall do this as well as I am able, not so much drawing on literary remains of this country, which, such as they were, are not now available, having been burnt by enemies or removed by our citizens when they went into exile, as foreign traditions: and that has frequent gaps to blur it.[46]

This statement has been treated in various manners by historians, some identifying the *transmarine relatione* as written sources; others as oral originating in Brittonic settlements in Brittany and Ireland. Given his extensive use or allusion to written works, it would seem most likely that Gildas's transmarine sources were of a literary character: Gildas had indeed read Orosius; the geographical introduction and various other constructions within his work

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[43] Wright, 'Gildas's Reading'.

[44] T. O'Loughlin, *Gildas and the Scriptures: Observing the World through a Biblical Lens*, Studia Traditionis Theologiae Explorations in Early and Medieval Thought 12 (Turnhout, 2012).

[45] Wright, 'Gildas's Reading', 129-52.

[46] *DEB*, 4.4.

point to first-hand knowledge of that work.[47] It would seem doubtful that an unknown

geographical compendium had come down to Gildas; it matters not that further unused

examples could have been drawn from Orosius that would have suited Gildas.[48] However,

Gildas's apparent mistaken attribution of the Walls of Hadrian and Antonine to the fifth

century has led modern scholars to question his accuracy as an 'historian' as well as his

purported use of sources. Yet as we have seen Gildas was not the only late antique author

who misplaced chronologically these monuments of imperial prestige; in fact, it was the

standard late antique practice, and Orosius also made such an error.[49]

It has been claimed, however, that had Gildas utilised Orosius he could not have

possibly made such a grievous inaccuracy, particularly when ancient historians sought to

contradict or correct previous scholars.[50] While it might have been the case that Gildas did

not want to draw his audience's attention to the literary sources for fear of contradiction, this

does not explain why he chose to assign the construction of the Walls to the post-Roman era.

Indeed, we must seek to discern why such Gildas would seek to alter the chronology – if

indeed if this is what he had done – at the risk of being decried a fraud. This matter is

returned to below; for now, we can recognise that Gildas used textual sources in the

construction of his argument, not all of which were gleaned from second-hand through the

medium of church fathers and grammarians.

Equally revealing is Gildas's above statement that British sources were unavailable to

him, having been destroyed or removed by those departing in exile. It is doubtful given the

nature of Roman historical writing that an internal account of Britain's downfall would have

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[47] Wright, 'Orosius', 31-42.

[48] *Contra* Thompson, 'Gildas and History', 210.

[49] Orosius, 7.7.

[50] Thompson, 'Gildas and History', 211.

been composed in the fourth or earlier fifth century. Other materials such as aristocratic letter collections similar to those of Sidonius were not compiled, though members of the Romano-British nobility must have been engaged in letter writing. Other documents, such as the 'appeal to Aëtius' seem to have been circulating in Gildas's time, though the extensiveness of such survivals is difficult to ascertain. On the other hand, the contribution of memory (Gildas's own; and other's) and oral testimony to the fabric of the *DEB* must have been more substantial the closer the narrative approached the present – that is, the rebellion of the Saxons and the ensuing war which included the victories of Ambrosius and the battle of Badon must have been items of popular remembrance. E. A. Thompson, for example, regarded Gildas's use of written testimony with measured scepticism; not so with oral tradition – this was regarded as central to the construction of the *DEB*'s historical section.[51]

Gildas, then, appears to have been reluctant to credit his sources; unlike Orosius, however, Gildas wrote a pamphlet-length piece, not a bulky historical work which could afford the space to reflect upon previous analyses.[52] It was not his purpose to refute previous works but rather to guide present knowledge; nonetheless, it was essential for his argument that the *historia* be accepted as a 'truthful' account of insular history. Scholarly procedure aside, Gildas's statement that he drew mainly, if not exclusively, on continental sources for his depiction of Roman Britain and her inhabitants is of the utmost importance, for, as we have seen in a previous chapter, these accounts almost universally portrayed Britain and the Britons in a negative light. As suggested below, the legacy of Roman historical and poetical observations of the Britons conceivably helped to shape Gildas's own thoughts on his fellow countrymen and their presentation in the *DEB*. It is, then, to these matters we turn now.

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[51] Thompson, 'The History', 206-7.

[52] For example, the deeds of Cicero described by Sallust: Orosius, 7.6.5.

<u>Gildasian Identity</u>

Throughout the *DEB*, the identity espoused by Gildas was defined by Christianity and the relationship between God, the island of Britain and her indigenous inhabitants. Indeed, Christianty was the very hallmark of Gildasian identity as it primarily distinguished his fellowcountrymen from the heathen peoples who had settled within Britain. As discussed below, Gildas used several related terms to denote the island's population: *gens*, *populus* and *cives*. The relationship between these labels and, indeed, there position within his *historia* was not static, as we see. However, first it is necessary to establish the scene in which Gildas's narrative was played out: the island of Britain.

Britannia

From the opening of *De Excidio*, *Britannia* forms a prominent role in Gildas's narrative.[53] The island was indeed central to the message promulgated within the *DEB* and from the outset it is clear that Gildas envisioned the entire island within his remit:

> *Britannia insula in extremo ferme orbis limite circium occidentemque versus divina, ut dicitur, statera terrae totius ponderatrice librata ab Africo boriali propensius tensa axi, octingentorum in longo milium, ducentorum in lato spatium…*

> The island of Britain lies almost at the end of the world, toward the north-west and west. Poised in the divine scales that (we are told) weigh the whole earth it stretches from the south-west towards the northern pole. It has a length of eight hundred miles, a width of two hundred…[54]

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[53] *DEB*, 3-4.

[54] *DEB*, 3.1.

Adapted somewhat from Orosius,[55] this passage suggests that Gildas was aware of Britain's dimensions, for he qualifies this statement by informing his audience that this description does not account for various large headlands that extend out between the curving bays of the ocean. In giving the dimensions of the *insula* Gildas clarified for his audience the integrity *Britannia*, which stretched from the southern coast to its northern fringes. However, as we shall see, Gildas's idea of Britain – or at least the Brittonic part of Britain – may have shifted in the altered circumstances which prevailed after the separation from the empire and the settlement of the *gentes*.

In opening the historical section of *De Excidio* with a geographical excursus, Gildas utilised a commonality of classical and late antique historical writing, situating his narrative within the traditions of Greco-Roman literary convention.[56] Yet whereas other authors described large swathes of the known world or located *Britannia* and the *Britanni* in relation to other peoples and places, as did Jordanes in a depiction cobbled together from various sources including Orosius and Tacitus,[57] Gildas focused solely upon Britain and its virtual isolation prior to arrival of the *rex Romanorum*.[58] Gildas's geographical introduction was, indeed, far from a literary topos, for he presented the island as an earthly paradise crafted by both man and God.[59] Here, we can see Gildas constructing the relationshio between the island, her inhabitants and God from the very foundations: through praising the wide plains and hills, the flowing rivers and clear fountains, Gildas offered his readership an image of a rural idyll, a veritable Garden of Eden where agriculture and pastoralism flourished. Nor

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[55] Orosius, 1.2.76; Wright, 'Gildas's Reading', 144; N. J. Higham, 'Old light on the Dark Age landscape: the description of Britain in the *De Excidio Britanniae* of Gildas', *Journal of Historical Geography* 17 (1991), 363-72.

[56] Merrills, *History and Geography*, pp. 20-24.

[57] Jordanes, *Getica*, ii.

[58] *DEB*, 5.1

[59] *DEB*, 3.2-4.

were these qualities the result, to Gildas's mind at least, of the Roman occupation: Britain's urbanity and agricultural fertility were God-given and innate to the island.[60]

Neither should the Garden of Eden analogy be seen as coincidence; this was indeed Gildas's 'origin legend' for the island's inhabitants: just as the First People originated in the Garden of Eden, so too had the Britons arrived fully formed in Britain, due to God's benevolence. They had, most definitely, not wandered there from places known or unknown. We should perhaps assume that Gildas's audience recognised this association, understanding it as central to the process in which they were considered God's Chosen People. Gildas, then, envisioned *Britannia* as the primary unit of adherence. Britain's importance to Gildas is evident in his use of *patria*, 'fatherland', as a synonym for the island; indeed, as early as the preface, Gildas announced that he spoke out to relieve the afflictions besetting his *patria* rather than his people or *gens* immediately alerting his audience to the centrality of the island to his forthcoming narrative.[61] The concept of the *patria*, moreover, was eternal, a common bond shared between the island's contemporary inhabitants and her ancient population; and Gildas wished to emphasise that the resolute defence of the *patria* was an act of the true patriot:

> *non militaris in mari classis parata fortiter dimicare pro patria nec quadratum*
> *agmen neque dextrum cornu aliive belli apparatus in litore conseruntur, sed terga*
> *pro scuto fugantibus dantur et colla gladiis.*

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[60] *Contra* A. C. Sutherland, 'The imagery of Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *GNA*, pp. 157-68.

[61] *DEB*, 1.1. M. Winterbottom, 'The Preface of Gildas' *De Excidio*', *THSC* (1975-5), 277-87.

> …no warlike fleet at sea prepared to struggle vigorously for the *patria*, no driven
>
> square, no right horn, no equipment of war planted on the shore. They surrendered
>
> their backs as shields to their pursuers, their necks to the swords.[62]

Despite his disgust at the inhabitants' less than vigorous defence of their *patria* in the face of
Roman aggression the message was clear, and in the context of Gildas's own day the
distinction could not have been greater; concern for an island-wide *patria* intended as a
contrast to the civil wars fought between and for the benefit of kings and their individual
territories.[63] However, Gildas could perhaps console himself that the timing of the invasion
was divinely approved, coinciding with the coming of Christ.[64] More importantly, the arrival
of the Roman king did not undermine the integrity of the island: Gildas's Britain remained
inviolate, the *insula* still extending from southern to northern shores; indeed, the division
between *provincia* and *barbaricum* created by the Roman conquest did not impinge on
Gildas's conception. There was, for instance, no notion that the late Roman diocese of
Britannia or the *Britanniae*, 'The Britains' – itself divided into four (or five) provinces – was
confined to the regions below the Hadrianic line. To some extent Gildas's view mirrored that
of some late antique sources, such as Orosius, which were disinclined to note the disjuncture
between the geographical extent of the island and the Roman diocese; however, as we shall
see, Gildas's reasons for ignoring such a division, if he knew different, were bound up in the
rationale of the *DEB*.

Britain played a complex role within the *DEB*; rather than a passive landscape on
which the actions of men were played out, the island was an active agent in their failings and
misadventures. Having created an idealised vision of Britain, a land of milk and honey,

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[62] *DEB*, 6.2

[63] *DEB*, 27.

[64] *DEB*, 5.2; drawing extensively on Orosius, 7.6.9; M. Miller, 'Bede's use of Gildas', *EHR* 90 (1975), 241-61

Gildas abruptly changes tack, launching into his denunciation which casts an altogether different image of the island and her qualities:

> *Haec erecta cervice et mente, ex quo inhabitata est, nunc deo, interdum civibus,*
> *nonnumquam etiam transmarinis regibus et subiectis ingrate consurgit. Quid enim*
> *deformius quidque iniquius potest humanis ausibus vel esse vel intromitti negotium*
> *quam deo timorem, bonis civibus caritatem, in altiore dignitate positis absque*
> *fidei detriment debitum denegare honorem et frangere divino sensui humanoque*
> *fidem, et abiecto caeli terraque metu propriis adinvenionibus aliquem et*
> *libidinibus regi?*

> Ever since it was first inhabited, Britain has been ungratefully rebelling, stiff-necked and haughty, now against God, now against its own citizens, sometimes even against kings from across the sea and their subjects. What daring of man, now or in the future, be more foul and wicked to deny God, charity to good citizens, honour to those placed in higher authority (for that is there due, granted, of course, that there is no harm to the faith): to break faith with man and God: to cast away fear of heaven and earth, and to be ruled each man by his own contrivances and lusts?[65]

Britain, then, was prone to violent outbursts from the very outset of her existence. However, this condition worsened with the Roman conquest, manifesting itself in the island's propensity for rebellion. It was Britain, for instance, the 'deceitful lioness' (*dolosa leaena*) who, in the absence of the Roman king treacherously slaughtered the Roman governors.[66] Gildas may have derived this example from Orosius' reference to the Boudiccan revolt of AD

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[65] *DEB*, 4.1

[66] *DEB*, 6. The lioness motif is also used for the continental home of the Saxons (23.3.), and in reference to Damnonia, the territory of Constantinus (28.1).

60 which in connection with the event did not mention any individuals.[67] It would thus have been safe for Gildas to infer that the island was responsible for this rebellion, a theme which would be repeated later in the narrative.

Britain's corrupting influence and her volatile nature was for Gildas most horrifyingly manifested in her habitual creation of *tyranni*.[68] Indeed, in quoting from a source he believed to be Porphyry – *Britannia fertilis provincia tyrannorum*, 'Britannia is a province fertile of tyrants' – Gildas sought to instruct his audience that this was a universally-held opinion.[69] It might be thought that here Gildas referred to the usurpations of the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries. However, the 'long past years when dreadful tyrants reigned' are equated by Gildas with the pre-Christian period,[70] suggesting that rather than a consequence of Roman political instability, tyrants were peculiarly British creatures, an ever-present feature of island life.[71] Persecution of Christians ensured tyrannical status.[72] According to Gildas, however, Britain's most notorious *tyrannus* was Magnus Maximus.

> *Itemque tandem tyrannorum virgultis crescentibus et in immanem silvam iam*
>
> *iamque erumpentibus insula, nomen Romanum nec tamen morem legemque tenens,*
>
> *quin potius abiciens germen suae plantationis amarissimae, ad Gallias magna*
>
> *comitante satellitum caterva, insuper etiam imperatoris insignibus, quae nec*
>
> *decenter usquam gessit, non legitime, sed ritu tyrannico et tumultuante initiatum*
>
> *milite, Maximum mittit.*

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[67] Orosius, 7.7.11.

[68] *DEB*, 4.3, 13.1, 27.

[69] *DEB*, 4.3. Jerome was the true author of this comment: *Ep.* 133.9.

[70] *DEB*, 4.3.

[71] For the island's contemporary kings as tyrants: *DEB*, 27.

[72] *DEB*, 9.1 (Diocletian), 13.2. (Magnus Maximus).

At length the tyrant thickets increased and were all but bursting into a savage

forest. The island was still Roman in name, but not in law and customs. Rather it

sent forth a sprig of its own bitter planting, and sent Maximus to Gaul with a great

retinue of hangers-on and even the imperial insignia, which he was never fit to

bear: he had no legal claim to the title, but was raised to it like a tyrant by

rebellious soldiery.[73]

Of probable Spanish origin, Maximus was a high-ranking military official who usurped

power in the West between 383 and 388, killing the emperor Gratian in the process.[74] Gildas

paid close attention to Maximus and his knowledge of Maximus' rebellions appears to have

derived from Orosius, whose description of Maximus as *imperator* may partly account for the

prominence of this individual in *DEB*.[75] Gildas's statement that Maximus had 'no legal claim

to the title' and was raised to the purple by rowdy soldiery, adapted rather than strictly

followed Orosius, who was rather more ambiguous in his treatment of the usurper.[76]

However, as Orosius did not style as *imperator* any of the subsequent fifth-century British

tyranni of which he was aware – that is, Gratian and Constantine III[77] – Gildas could set aside

these incidents as mere trifling affairs: after all, these usurpers destroyed neither legitimate

emperors nor pious youths and their actions, if recorded at all by Gildas, could be placed

comfortably into the post-Roman period.[78]

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[73] *DEB*, 13.1.

[74] Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 173-82. There is little or, indeed, no reason to suppose that Gildas wilfully ignored Maximus' putative Spanish origin, *contra* Turner, 'Identity in Gildas', 42. See Ch. 3.

[75] Orosius, 7.34.9. Gildas's hostility towards Maximus might also be explained if Maximus is accepted to be the *superbus tyrannus* of 23; see Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 519-26; *idem*, *Worlds of Arthur*, pp. 191-4.

[76] *DEB*, 13.1. Orosius, 7.34.9.

[77] Orosius, 7.34.9. Marcus, the first in this series of early fifth-century British usurpers, is omitted.

[78] They may have been the anointed kings mentioned by Gildas (21.4), see Woolf, 'Romans to Barbarians', p. 354. A similar conclusion seems to be have been reached by Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 3.2.31-8, ed. and trans., H. B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1916).

It is possible that Gildas's depiction of Maximus was influenced by attitudes emanating from the Honorian court, contained in the panegyrics of Claudian. As we have seen, the Theodosian House had an acrimonious view of Britain, with Maximus retaining the status of enemy of the imperial family following his destruction in 388 at the hands of Honorius father, Theodosius the Great. Inferring a direct relationship between Claudian and Gildas is problematic, however. Claudian died in 404 but his poems continued to circulate amongst aristocratic circles in East and West in four different collections, including those concerned with high politics, the *carmina maiora*, published on the orders of his former paymaster, Stilicho, prior to August, 408.[79] How these poems might have reached Britain is unclear, though as imperial propaganda there is no *a priori* reason for them not to have reached diocesan Britain. Perhaps if the Rescript of Honorius of *c*. 410 truly represents a response to a plea for military aid from the diocese, then the British legation might have returned with the poems amongst their possessions.[80]

However, the poems may have reached Britain in a rather less direct manner. Firstly, it cannot be doubted that Claudian was well-received amongst fifth-century audiences and poets, such as Sidonius's, whose own work imitates Claudian's so openly and reverentially.[81] Within Sidonius's network of friends and correspondents, moreover, was Faustus, a British-born ecclesiastic, onetime abbot of Lérins and bishop of Riez, who over the course of his long career, which spanned several decades of the fifth century, maintained links with, and an interest in, Britain.[82] Thus ecclesiastical and friendship links may have provided one method

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[79] Cameron, *Claudian*, pp. 417-18.

[80] For the Honorian Rescript, which may have been directed towards Bruttium, Italy, not Britain, see Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 41-2; Birley, *Roman Government of Britain*, pp. 461-2, favours Bruttium.

[81] G. Kelly, 'Sidonius and Claudian', in J. A. van Waarden and G. Kelly (eds.), *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris* (Leuven, 2013), pp. 171-93, at pp. 175-85; Cameron, *Claudian*, p. 419

[82] I. Wood, 'Continuity or Calamity: The Constraints of Literary Models', Drinkwater and Elton (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul*, pp. 9-18, at p. 14; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 199-202.

by which Claudian's poems were transmitted to Britain. It might nonetheless seem inappropriate – or at least outside his sphere of interest – for Gildas to have possessed or consulted such material, particularly by a poet described by Orosius as *paganus pervicacissimus*, 'a most steadfast pagan'.[83] Despite Claudian's trumpeted paganism, it was no issue for Christians such as Sidonius to have venerated his poetry as a highly sophisticated product of Latin literary culture. Nor was Vergil's *Aeneid* anathema for Gildas or other Christian writers; therefore given the culture of late antique Britain, it should not necessarily surprise us that Gildas could have come into contact with this material and utilised it to fill the substantial void left by the ending of Orosius' interest in Britain.

If, then, we can accept tentatively Gildas's use of Claudian's poetry, he may have been drawn to the passage which appears to credit the island with the origins of Maximus' rebellion: *hunc saeva Britannia fudit*, 'fierce Britain hurled out this one'.[84] Claudian probably did not consider Maximus to have been British; rather, he was implying that over-exposure to this supposedly barbaric and peripheral diocese had a detrimental effect on an individual's internal constitution.[85] This image of a 'fierce', tyrant-producing island may have required for Gildas horrifyingly little adaptation to fit his scheme: he could interpret, then, the implication found in Claudian and state overtly in reference to Maximus that Britain *abiciens germen suae plantationis amarissimae*, 'cast forth a shoot of her own most bitter planting'.[86]

That for Gildas the tyrant Maximus was 'of Britain' is thus axiomatic. However, Gildas's portrayal of Maximus' usurpation must be understood in the context of the relationship between Britain and the Romans, which was a wider issue within the *DEB*. Prior

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[83] Orosius, 7.35.20.

[84] Claudian, *Panegyricus De Quarto Consulatu Honorii Augusti*, 72-4.

[85] Eugenius, the other unnamed usurper in Claudian's poem, 'contracted' his tyranny from close association with the barbarous and 'Germanic' Arbogast: *Panegyricus De Quarto Honorii Augusti*, 74.

[86] *DEB*, 13.1.

to Maximus' tyranny, the Romans had reduced the island's population to servitude, stamping her riches with the image of Caesar, *ita ut non Britannia sed Romania censeretur*, 'so that it should be rated not as Britannia but as Romania'.[87] Plassmann has suggested that 'at this stage of history Romans and Britons are identical'.[88] However, servitude and exploitation does not represent equality; indeed, the imagery is crucial: while Britain's population had been legitimately reduced to servitude and her resources exploited – for their rebelliousness demanded such a response – the imposition of 'Romanness' was merely external, a brand stamped upon gold and silver, not upon the soul of the island and her people. Thus, superficial and only imperfectly achieved, the transition from *Britannia* to *Romania* was merely skin-deep. Indeed, for Gildas it was inevitable this façade would not persist and consequently major changes precipitated Maximus' usurpation: *insula nomen Romanum nec tamen morem legemque tenens*, 'the island was still Roman in name, but not by law and custom'.[89] This statement tells us nothing of late fourth-century romanization; rather, it repeats the motif referred to above where external appearance hides a more complex, internal condition with Britain's retention of the Roman name masking her rebellious and violent nature. Maximus' seizure of the imperial throne was thus illegitimate, an affront to the divine order which resulted in the destruction or expulsion of two legitimate emperors, one a pious youth.[90] But in some senses Maximus was a cypher through which Britain manifested her savage which was prone to infect the personality of her people; thus Maximus accedes to power not through courage or strength (*virtus*) but through the application of cunning (*calliditas*) and 'of his false oaths and mendacity' (*periurii mendaciique*).[91]

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[87] *DEB*, 7.

[88] Plassmann, 'Negative Image', 8.

[89] *DEB*, 13.1

[90] *DEB*, 13.2.

[91] *DEB*, 13.2.

The negative circumstances of Maximus' rise appear to be Gildas's interpretation. However, the description of its abrupt end may possibly have been derived from Claudian. Whilst Maximus' beheading went unrecorded by Orosius, Rufinus or Sulpicius Severus it is implied by Claudian in his reference to the execution of Maximus and Eugenius:

> *...suos manibusque revinctis oblati gladiis summittunt colla paratis et vitam*
>
> *veniamque rogant*

> … their hands bound behind their backs, they offered forth their necks to the
>
> sword's imminent stroke, asking for life and pardon.[92]

Even more intriguing is the similarity between this passage and that used by Gildas to describe the punishment of the *populus* subsequent to their failed rebellion, which though not an exact parallel is marked enough to suggest that Gildas was inspired to create a thematic link between the treatment of failed British rebels:

> *...suos **manibusque** revinctis oblati **gladiis** summittunt **colla** paratis et vitam*
>
> *veniamque rogant.*[93]

> *sed terga pro scuto fugantibus dantur et **colla gladiis**, gelido per ossa tremore*
>
> *currente, **manusque** vinciendae uliebriter protenduntur.*[94]

Both the Honorian court and Gildas appear to have dedicated energy to creating a negative memory of Maximus. However, while both attached lasting significance to this tyrannical figure, for the Honorian regime, Theodosius' triumph signalled the reunification of the Empire under a single emperor.[95] Yet Gildas, concerned solely with insular developments,

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[92] Claudian, *Panegyricus De Quarto Consulatu Honorii Augusti*, 84-86. Also noted by McKee, 'Lessons from History', 13.

[93] Claudian, *Panegyricus De Quarto Consulatu Honorii Augusti*, 84-86.

[94] *DEB*, 6.2.

[95] Valentinian II appears to have been an irrelevance.

depicted Maximus' downfall and death as having dire consequences for Britain, his ambition having denuded the island of its *ingenti iuventute*, 'mighty youth'.[96] Here there is no sense that Maximus' army was an imperial force, foreign to the island; and this is how eastern authors broadly contemporary to Gildas, such as Sozomen, perceived these events, with Maximus at the head of an army of ethnic Britons and Celts.[97]

Maximus' departure was pivotal, leaving Britain for the first time open to the raids of the Picts and Scots.[98] But despite the island's responsibility in the creation of Maximus she was still able to appeal to Rome:

> *Ob quarum infestationem ac dirissimam depressionem legatos Romam cum*
>
> *epistolis mittit, militarem manum ad se vindicandam lacrimosis postulationibus*
>
> *poscens et subiectionem sui Romano imperio continue tota animi virtute, si hostis*
>
> *longius arceretur, vovens.*

> As a result of their dreadful and devastating onslaughts, She sent envoys with a letter to Rome plaintively requesting a military force to protect them and vowing whole-hearted and uninterrupted loyalty to the Roman *imperium* so long as their enemies were kept at a distance.[99]

It is notable that it was Britain (and not the *Britanni*) who sent (*mittit*) the appeal to Rome, suggesting that the island retained a sense of personality throughout this period; Britain, moreover, was despite the departure of its army still an integral whole. Rome responded swiftly, dispatching a legion *in patria* to deal with the barbarians, driving them from her

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[96] *DEB*, 14.

[97] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 7.13: 'In the meantime, Maximus gathered a very large army of Britons, neighbouring Gauls, Celts and the tribes thereabouts and entered Italy'. Trans. S. Ireland, *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook* (3rd edn. London, 2008), p. 151.

[98] *DEB*, 14.

[99] *DEB*, 15.1.

boundaries (*e finibus*) and freeing her inhabitants from imminent slavery.[100] However, after years of secret resentment and rebelliousness there is something ironic in Britain's promises of lasting and total submission; the empire in Britain had passed and certainly these vows might be regarded as nothing but the empty sentiments of an island whose inhabitants' faithlessness was proverbial. While, then, the Romans returned to the island and drove out the *gentes* they tried to establish the island on a footing of its own, instructing her (*iussit*) to build a wall between the two seas.[101] Scholars have interpreted Gildas on this point as meaning either the Britons as useless for constructing a turf wall or the turf wall being useless as it was constructed by Britons.[102] Whatever interpretation one favours, the population failed to defend properly the Wall and therefore requested aid once again from Rome. For the last time, the Roman army returned, defeated the barbarians and in a last frustrated effort to get the Britons to stand alone, constructed a stone wall prior to their final departure meant to defend the Britons from Pictish incursions.

Again, it must be reiterated at this point Britain was a singular entity, the entire island from south to north inhabited by a single population. With the final departure of the Romans Pictish and Scottic raiding recommenced; however, this time the Picts established themselves in the far north, right up to the Wall. As we shall see, Gildas represented the Picts and Scots as overseas peoples foreign to Britain. Here, then, we must emphasise that the construction of the Walls, the failure of the indigenous population to defend them and the settlement of the Picts marks a watershed moment in the 'ruin of Britain'. It is often assumed that Gildas made a serious blunder in assigning the construction of the walls to the post-Roman era and that had he had knowledge of Orosius he would have known they were built under Septimius

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[100] *DEB*, 15.2.

[101] 15.3.

[102] McKee, 'Lessons from History', 19; Miller, 'Bede's use of Gildas', 244-5; Higham, 'Roman Walls and British Dykes', 9.

Severus. This, however, would have totally undermined his vision, discussed below, of the Romans as a militaristic *gens* and the masters of the entire world – simply put, the Romans could not be depicted as needing a wall to defend themselves against the Picts and while they were in Britain the island remained whole. Rather, in order to explain how Britain had begun to be populated by other peoples he needed a device with which both to credit the Romans and disparage the Britons; in the Britons failure to protect the Wall and prevent the Pictish settlement, he found one. Whether or not, then, Gildas was aware of *Historia Augusta* or any other work which refers to the construction of the stone *murus*, we find in his work a sentiment close to that contained in other late antique histories which viewed the Wall as the demarcation point between civility and barbarism, Christianity and paganism and, indeed, Briton and Pict.

At the opening of his historical section, Gildas had offered two contending visions of Britain: one of a land abundant in natural resources and guarded by a virtually impregnable ocean fortress; and the other a rebellious, morally corrupt entity racked by continual invasion and the settlement of barbarians: either, he warned, could prevail in the future. A tension exists, then, from the very outset of Gildas's narrative, for however bountiful the island appeared to be (and this in itself was an issue), Britain was always capable of overthrowing the natural order and corrupting her inhabitants. The settlement of the Picts thus marks a convenient point from which to begin discussion of the island's inhabitants and the terms used of them; to this we turn now.

Britanni

In many respects, the notion that the *Britanni* were central to Gildas's narrative appears to be axiomatic: after all, the *Britanni* were a well-attested ethnic or diocesan group familiar to

Roman poets and historians since at least the time of Caesar.[103] Consequently, as an established *natio* or *gens* it would be natural to assume that Gildas addressed his complaint to the *Britanni* collectively; an assumption that manifests itself in the scholarly tendency to continually cite 'Britons' in analyses of *De Excidio* – a compulsion, as we shall see, unmatched by Gildas.[104] There can, however, be little doubt that Gildas was aware that the indigenous inhabitants of *Britannia* could be described collectively as *Britanni*. A distinction must nonetheless remain between on the one hand recognizing that Gildas knew and used this label and, on the other, regarding *Britanni* as having a cohesive power in Gildas's narrative. It appears only twice in his *historia*. First introduced during chapter six, '*Britanni*' occurs in the context of the population's cowardly defence of their *patria*:

> *ita ut in proverbium et derisum longe lateque efferretur quod Brittani nec in bello*
> *fortes sint nec pace fideles.*
>
> In fact it was spread abroad far and wide as a derisive proverb that the Britons are
> neither strong in war nor faithful in peace.[105]

The Roman literary world was strewn with references to the martial inadequacies of barbarian peoples, including Tacitus' reference to the fighting spirit of the *Britanni*.[106] However, whether Gildas genuinely encountered such a widely diffused proverb insulting the *Britanni*'s martial spirit or if these lines were simply a product of his overly anxious and moralistic mind is unclear. In tandem with this literary knowledge, the recent defeat of two British-based usurpers might indeed have turned such a view into a proverb.

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[103] Stewart, 'Inventing Britain', 1-10: see Ch. 2.

[104] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p. 203, n. 52.

[105] *DEB*, 6.2.,

[106] *Agricola*, 13.

Britanni next appears during chapter twenty in the so-called letter to Aëtius.[107] This famous appeal directed towards the Roman general Aëtius, 'thrice consul', belongs to the years between 446 and 454 – that is, during the period in which Aëtius indeed held his third consulship, prior to his assassination at the hands of the emperor, Valentinian III.[108] The aim of the appeal was to elicit aid against the barbarians afflicting Britain, though doubts have been raised as to whether this refers to the Picts and Scots – as implied by Gildas – or to Saxon raiders. Thus Gildas may have inserted the appeal where it suited his narrative – that is, as a mechanism explaining the invitation to the Saxons, rather than at the appropriate contextual and chronological juncture.[109] Whatever the case, the appeal, which articulates the *Britanni*'s twin fears of death at the hands of the barbarians or drowning in the sea, culminates with *gemitus Britannorum*, 'the lament of the Britons'.[110] It is possible that the appeal came from *Britanniae*, 'the Britains', the Roman diocese of *Britannia*, rather than 'the Britons'. If this were the case, the letter would have been a combined plea possibly sent by two or more of the four (or five) provinces that constituted the Roman diocese, although given the date of the letter this might appear unlikely. However, the genitive plural 'Britannorum' suggests 'the Britons' were the more likely authors of the appeal; and that those responsible recognized the significance of '*Britanni*' in a Roman diplomatic context, perhaps as an expression of either provincial or diocesan identity. Either way, the direct quotation or paraphrase of a written source indicates Gildas, though recognising that authors of this appeal were his subjects – and therefore constituted, to some degree, his contemporary audience – may have faithfully reproduced the letter's terminology without any intention to give prominence to *Britanni*.

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[107] *DEB*, 20. See M. E. Jones 'The Appeal to Aetius in Gildas', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 32 (1988), 41-55; Higham, 'Gildas and "Agitius"', 123-34.

[108] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 51-2.

[109] P. Sims-Williams, 'The Settlement of England in Bede and the Chronicle', *ASE* 12 (1983), 1-41, at 6-15.

[110] *DEB*, 20.1. The imagery of twin dangers is also apparent in Claudian's *In Rufinum Liber Secundus*, 90-92.

The historical section of *De Excidio* contains, then, a mere two explicit uses of the ethnonym *Britanni*. And whilst it is evident that Gildas and presumably his audience recognized that *Britanni* stood as a collective term for the island's indigenous inhabitants, it is less clear that Gildas attached any particular emphasis to this label; certainly the separation by a full fourteen chapters of the first and second appearances of *Britanni* does little to substantiate its supposed centrality to *DEB*'s message. More importantly, Gildas associated *Britanni* with a mocking proverb and a failed cry for help, both perhaps themselves taken from written sources – hardly the most dignified of contexts. The appearance of *Britanni* therefore need not reflect Gildas's aspirations; indeed, the evident failure of the letter to Aëtius may have drawn Gildas away from utilizing *Britanni* as a marker of collective identity.

There is perhaps a further reason for Gildas's reticence. Gildas was concerned to highlight the uniqueness of the insular population, a process which, paradoxically, may have involved deliberate exclusion of a foundation legend similar to those found in other late antique and early medieval texts, or even classical literature such as the *Aeneid* which often explained the origins of a people, their connection to other population groups through kinship and their migration from an ancient homeland. Indeed, the absence of such an explanation stands in contrast to later Brittonic historiography which credited the Britons with Trojan descent.[111] Rather, as noted above, Britain was a Garden of Eden and her inhabitants were native to her shores – they had wandered from nowhere and were kindred with no other people, apart from, in a spiritual sense, the Israelites. Indeed, Latin ethnographic material concerned with non-Roman peoples understood the *Britanni* to be part of a larger matrix of barbarian *nationes* which, while sometimes noting their unique characteristics, also referred

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[111] The ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, which dedicated a number of chapters explaining the various ancestors of the Britons, including their descent from the Trojans: *Historia Brittonum*, §§10-18

to the similarities between the appearance and habits of the Britons with those of the neighbouring peoples of Gaul, Spain and Germania.[112] Whilst we cannot be sure Gildas encountered the views of Caesar, Tacitus, or others like them, such ethnography may have conflicted with the aims of *De Excidio* by linking rather than separating the *Britanni* from the other peoples of ancient Europe.[113]

We should be cautious therefore in placing too much emphasis on the label 'Britons' in our discussion of Gildas's text, for while it is a convenient term, there exists no discernible emphasis on the ethnonym *Britanni* within the *DEB*. We might nonetheless explore the other terms for group cohesion used throughout his narrative.

Gens

Gildas deployed *gens* in a variety of ways and in fact used it to describe all population groups within the *DEB*. However, this was somewhat of a departure from Roman period usage which had invariably dscribed the Britons collectively as a *natio* or *populus*, comprised of sub-groups which Caesar and Tacitus had referred to as *civitates* and *gentes*. Rather, Gildas as suited his purpose of accentuating the indigenous population's special religious status utilised *gens* on occasion to illustrate their closeness to God: in chapter twenty-six, for instance, Gildas appears to favour *gens* as a collective noun explicitly linking the peoples of Britain and Israel: 'in this people (*gens*) the Lord could make trial (as he tends to) of his latter-day Israel'.[114] Prior to this, during the preface, Gildas had referred to the House of Israel as God's firstborn son (*primogenitus*) and as a *gens*, *populus* and *natio*.[115] Gildas was of course

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[112] Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, 5.14; Tacitus, *Agricola*, 10-11. Cf. the multiple peoples that contributed to the *gens Anglorum*, Bede, *HE*, i.1; v.9.

[113] Tacitean views of the *Britanni* were still circulating in the eastern Roman empire in the mid-sixth century: see Jordanes, *Getica*, ii.

[114] *DEB*, 26.1.

[115] *DEB*, 1.13.

determined that his audience should identify themselves as belonging to the 'new Israel'; thus his depiction of both modern Britain and biblical Israel being inhabited by *gens* and *populus* appears to have been an attempt to create a thematic link between the pair. The religious use of *gens* is accentuated elsewhere in the text, particularly when Gildas refers to the Church as the *gentium dominam,* 'mistress of peoples'.[116] Gildas did not, however, retain a positive, Christian usage of this term throughout, referring elsewhere to the indigenous population as a 'cunning people'.[117]

It must be stressed that while *gens* is used to denote Britain's indigenous population nowhere in the *DEB* does Gildas associate directly *gens* and the ethnonym *Britanni*. In the eighth century Bede could conceptualise the Britons in this manner and so too the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*.[118] Indeed, the association of *gens* + ethnonym was a commonality of late antique and early medieval historical writings, such as the *Getica* of Jordanes.[119] Bede, moreover, used *gens* as a term defining both English 'national' identity and Anglo-Saxon regional identity.[120] These works of course cannot have influenced Gildas; yet they are useful in indicating the extent to which *gens* played a cohesive role in texts detailing the history of particular national or ethnic groups. Indeed, while Gildas and Bede might share the religious concept of the *gens*, signalling it had a unifying power in a spiritual sense, the absence of *gens* + ethnonym from the *DEB* does appear mark Gildas's work out as different from those writings concerned with former barbarian peoples.

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[116] *DEB*, 1.5.

[117] *DEB*, 7. Cf. 21.1.

[118] Bede, *HE*, i.1, ii.20, iii.28, v.9, v.19. Individuals were also described by Bede as *de natione Brettonum*: iii.4, iii.10. Hence, Merrills' use of this term, as well as 'Brettonum', in his own analysis does not reflect a similar prominence in the *DEB*.

[119] Jordanes, *Getica*, iii.

[120] Bede, *HE*, i.34; ii.14.

Elsewhere Gildas's deployment of *gens* resembles its usage in Roman historical works where *gentes* was used habitually to describe the barbarian population who dwelt on and beyond the Empire's frontiers.[121] It should occasion no surprise therefore that Gildas could conform to the literary depiction of the wild barbarian and refer to Britain's enemies, the unclothed and longhaired Picts and Scots, as *duabus gentibus vastatricibus* 'two ravaging peoples'.[122] Gildas, then, in his use of the term *gens* appears to be walking the line between two worlds: for him, and in seeming contrast to previous depictions of them, the Britons were a *gens* – that is, a people in the biblical sense. However, there also remained a civilised world threatened by barbarian *gentes*, a thought very much indebted to Roman historiography, although again here biblical parallels, such as the threat of the Babylonians to the Israelites, were also relevant.

While Gildas recognised that *gens* could apply to the whole of humanity, as in his concession that the errors afflicting the world prior to the advent of Christianity were 'common to all peoples' (*communes omnibus gentibus*),[123] he had greater reason for pressing the separate existence and origins of the Scots and Picts. This is evident in Gildas's claim that these peoples were *gentibus transmarinis* 'overseas peoples',[124] a judgement seen as erroneous in regards to the Picts.[125] Yet rather than an error which makes 'no sense',[126] the

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[121] E.g. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 20.1.1., 26.4.5.

[122] *DEB*, 2, 19.1.

[123] *DEB*, 4.2.

[124] *DEB*, 14. Wright ('Gildas's Geographical Perspective', p. 87), has noted that *transmarinis* always refers to areas overseas from mainland Britain, such as the continent or Ireland.

[125] Virtually all commentators have regarded Gildas as mistaken in this: Wright, 'Gildas's Geographical Perspective', p. 87: 'If Gildas indeed portrays them [the Picts] as external foes from overseas after the departure of Maximus, he is unquestionably guilty of an error of chronology'; and George, *Gildas and the Early British Church*, pp. 49-50: '…Gildas is [also] saying that the Picts came from 'overseas'…he has got it very wrong', are typical. For the possible influence of Claudian on Gildas's depiction of the Picts as an overseas people, see McKee, 'Lessons from History', 13-15.

[126] George, *Gildas and the Early British Church*, p. 49.

external origins of the Scots, and especially the Picts, was fundamental to the *DEB*'s

rationale. The indigenous inhabitants of Britain were the island's rightful *gens* – created by

God to inhabit what Gildas regarded as a Garden of Eden. This eternal truth was shattered

when in the aftermath of Maximus' rebellion the Picts,

> *omnem aquilionalem extremamque terrae partem pro indigenis muro tenus*
> *capessunt.*
>
> captured all of the extreme north part of the land from the indigenous inhabitants,
>
> right up to the wall.[127]

Gildas's characterisation of the island's population as 'indigenous' was a deliberate contrast

with the non-indigenous Pictish *gens*. Therefore whether or not Gildas derived their overseas

origins from textual sources, it was paramount that the Pictish settlement was presented as the

illegitimate seizure of indigenous territory by an intrusive, overseas *gens*. Had Gildas been

aware of the Picts' 'British' origins, it would have nonetheless been impossible for him to

depict Britain as having been inhabited by other *gentes* for such an admission would have

rendered his argument nonsensical. Although the Pictish settlement would be eclipsed by the

subsequent and seemingly more important Saxon *adventus*, their seizure of northern Britain

represented a major facet in the ruin of Britain.

For Gildas, then, *gens* represented humanity in its entirety. More specifically and

importantly, it was used by him to mark Britain's indigenous inhabitants as God's Chosen

People, the major theme which ran through his work; however, it was never used explicitly to

refer to the *gens Brittonum*. Indeed, *gens* was used as a term for other peoples mentioned in

the historical section suggesting it had a general significance within the *DEB*. While we have

not yet spoken of the Roman *gens* it is perhaps best to illustrate their qualities and influence

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[127] *DEB*, 19.1.

over Britain and her inhabitants in comparison with attributes associated with the island's

population, which are developed most vividly through Gildas's use of a second term:

populus.

Populus

First and foremost, by describing both Britain's original population and the biblical Israelites

as *populi* Gildas created a link between these groups, emphasising the latter's inheritance of

the Israelites' position as God's select kindred.[128] In his use of *populus*, Gildas may have

been influenced by Orosius, who not only identified both the *Britanni* and *Galli* as *populi* but

highlighted their fondness for insurrection and the arming of *tyranni*.[129] While lacking the

imitations and echoes noted by Wright,[130] Gildas may have utilized this passage by isolating

and deploying those terms Orosius associated with the *Britanni* which coincided with his

argument: *populi*, *bella civilia*, *tyranni* and *cives*. Nevertheless, while Gildas refers uniquely

to the indigenous population as *populus*, the island's rightful inhabitants were defined by

several negative characteristics:

> *...sed transfretans insulae parendi leges nullo obsistente advexit, imbellemque*
>
> *populum sed infidelem non tam ferro igne machinis, ut alias gentes, quam solis*
>
> *minis vel iudiciorum concussionibus, in superficie tantum vultus presso in altum*
>
> *cordis dolore sui oboedientiam proferentem edictis subiugavit.*

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[128] *DEB*, 1.13.

[129] Orosius, 5.22.7: *nam cum plerumque improbi tyranni temere inuadentes rempublicam usurpatoque regio statu Romani imperii corpus abruperint atque ex eo bella uel per se iniusta inportarint uel in se iusta commouerint, Britannis Gallisque et creati populis et instructi: haec bella, quantum externis proxima tantum longinqua ciuilibus, quid nisi socialia iure uocitentur, cum ipsi Romani ne Sertorii quidem aut Perpennae aut Crixi aut Spartaci bella ciuilia uspiam nominarint?*

[130] Wright, 'Gildas's Reading', 144-6. It is to be wondered whether Gildas was interpreting Orosius 5.22.7 in his reference to tyrants of long past years: *DEB*, 3-4.

> Crossing the strait, and meeting no resistance, it [Rome] brought laws of
> obedience to the island. The *populus*, unwarlike but unfaithful, were not subdued,
> like other *gentes* by the sword, fire and engines of war, so much as by mere threats
> and legal penalties. Their obedience to the edicts of Rome was superficial: their
> resentment they kept in their hearts.[131]

Orosius may have informed Gildas's narrative at this point. If this were the case, then it was likely to have made uncomfortable reading for Gildas, particularly in the apparent ease that Claudius subjugated the entire island and its neighbouring archipelagos.[132] While Gildas may have reconciled the Roman conquest with the knowledge that this victory was God-ordained, it was still of concern that unlike other peoples Britain's *populus* were subdued by threats rather than force. Indeed, Gildas deplored their *imbellitas*, for a stout defence of the *patria*, even one resulting in bloody slaughter, was preferable to cowardice.[133]

It was the second indigenous characteristic, however, *infidelitas* which was for Gildas the true abomination – he was certain that submission to a higher authority must be performed openly and honestly.[134] Yet the *populus* could perform no honest submission: resentment was internalised. As we have seen in the case of the image of Caesar stamped on Britain's riches and the island's renunciation of Roman law and customs, the motif of an external countenance concealing an inner condition was central to the *DEB*'s message. This aspect of the *populus*' collective personality plagued their relationship with the Romans; thus the departing *rex Romanorum* blissfully unaware of the secret resentment harboured by the *populus*, left only governors (*rectores*) to apply Roman rule (*Romani regni*) over the

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[131] *DEB*, 5.2.

[132] Orosius, 7.6.9-11.

[133] On *imbellitas*: Plassmann, 'Negative Image', 7-8.

[134] *DEB*, 4.1. On *infidelitas*: Plassmann, 'Negative Image', 9-10.

inhabitants.[135] The ensuing rebellion however merely exemplified the cowardly nature of the *populus*, for it was conceivable to Gildas that only in the absence of the Roman king and his army would the *populus* dare renounce their adherence to Rome through recourse to warfare; this being the reaction of *vulpeculas subdolas*, 'crafty little foxes',[136] imagery derived possibly from Cicero,[137] or Claudian.[138] Rebellion was matched by Roman reprisal, with an army dispatched to deal with the traitors. Yet rather than protecting their homeland, the *populus* reverted to their characteristic aversion to warfare, offering their backs as shields and their necks to the swords.[139] Again, Gildas was disgusted by the *populus'* response for they should have stoutly defended their island *patria*; indeed, while their *infidelitas* had provoked a legitimate response from the Romans, the instruments of God's displeasure, a valiant defence of the *patria* could have earned the *populus* a measure of respectability.

The characteristics that defined Britain's inhabitants – cowardliness and infidelity – thus contrasted them with the Romans.[140] Retaining the distinction between 'Britons' and 'Romans' was indeed essential for Gildas, and it is in his depiction of the Roman conquest as a military triumph – which in fact appears an accurate reading of Orosius,[141] who stated that Claudius returned to Rome following the swift, bloodless, submission of the island – that Gildas could distinguish between the *populus* and the Romans *gens*. Here, Gildas seems perhaps to be pioneering the use of the term *gens* to signify the Romans; indeed, for Roman authors of the early and late empire the Romans were the *populus Romanus* and those beyond

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[135] *DEB*, 6.1.

[136] *DEB*, 6.2.

[137] McKee, 'Lessons from History', 5 with n. 30.

[138] Claudian, *In Rufinum Liber Secundus*, 483-4: *truculentos ingerit ursis, praedonesque lupis, fallaces vulpibus addit*.

[139] *DEB*, 6.2.

[140] Plassmann, 'Negative Characteristics', 8-9.

[141] Orosius, 7.6.10.

were *gentes*, Even though Roman period texts had often described the Britons as a *natio*, the seeming relegation of the Romans to a *gens* was an innovation of major significance as it reduced the distinctiveness of the Romans, to some degree. In any case, the Britons were now the *populus*.

Thus while Plassmann has claimed that Britain's conquest meant that at 'this stage in history Romans and Britons are identical',[142] Gildas's account contained no hint of settlement, peaceful or otherwise, and certainly no indication of 'romanization' as suggested somewhat sinisterly by Tacitus.[143] Britain was Roman only so far as the Britons were slaves to Roman masters; indeed, for Gildas the Romans merely conquered and governed, a sound conclusion reached on the basis of his sources.[144] At no point, then, were the island's population envisaged to be citizens of a global empire: they were in thrall to the *rex Romanorum* and subject to the whims of his *rectores*. The relationship between the *populus* and the Romans did not remain static, however; after Maximus' rebellion – that is, following Britain's renunciation of Roman law and custom, the Romans, no longer returned to the island as conquerors, wielding the whip and removing the island's natural wealth; rather, they had become Britain's guardians, protecting the *populus*, who were 'Like fearful chicks submitting under the wings of their loyal father' (*timidi pulli partum fidissimis alis succumbentes*).[145]

The island's inhabitants, once the subject of justified Roman persecution, were now the recipients of their benevolence, this virile militaristic *gens* protecting the population as a parent would its children. However, this situation could not last and eventually the Romans,

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[142] Plassmann, 'Negative Image', 8.

[143] Tacitus, *Agricola*, 21.

[144] It is therefore unclear why Gildas's model of Roman rule should be 'erroneous': McKee, 'Lessons from History', 6.

[145] *DEB*, 17.1.

having constructed the stone Wall, left the island for the final time.[146] Gildas, then, viewed the post-Maximus Romans in a reverential light; whilst he had recognised their role earlier in the narrative as the agents of divine will, he now depicted them in a warm manner, aiding the Britons for as long as possible. Britain, then, was not ruined as a consequence of the island's absorption into the Roman *imperium* – an event which secured and, arguably, extended her boundaries. Rather, the catastrophic events that surrounded Maximus' tyranny altered irrevocably the relationship between the *populus* and the Romans, somewhat paradoxically bringing them closer than at any other point in the narrative. The final farewell of the Roman *gens*, now 'worthy allies' rather than conquerors, was thus disastrous for the *populus* who without the ability to defend themselves succumbed and allowed an intrusive *gens* to settle in the island. Nevertheless, the circumstances of Britain's departure from the empire provided the catalyst for a terminological shift in Gildas's conception of collective identity.

Cives

Christianity was of ultimate significance for Gildas, both at a personal level and as a fundamental part of his message. The use of the terms *gens* and *populus*, when used to denote the island's indigenous people stress this importance by accentuating the link between the biblical Israelites and Britain's contemporary population. In particular, *gens* and *populus*, the latter appearing to be the preferred option, were used in order that his audience would, hopefully, recognise themselves to be the new Israelites. In the latter stages of his *historia*, Gildas stepped up this effort emphasizing explicitly the link between the Israelites and the *populus*/*gens*. However, this link was further strengthened by the (re)introduction of a term unique to the *populus* – *cives*. Indeed, whereas Gildas had first introduced *Britannia* into his narrative, so too did he introduce citizenship into his vision of community:

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[146] *DEB*, 18.1-2.

> *Haec erecta cervice et mente, ex quo inhabitata est, nunc deo, interdum civibus, nonnumquam etiam transmarinis regibus et subiectis ingrate consurgit. Quid enim deformius quidque iniquius potest humanis ausibus vel esse vel intromitti negotium quam deo timorem, bonis civibus caritatem, in altiore dignitate positis absque fidei detriment debitum denegare honorem et frangere divino sensui humanoque fidem..?*

> Ever since it was first inhabited, Britannia has been ungratefully rebelling, stiff-necked and haughty, now against God, now against her own countrymen (*cives*), sometimes even against kings from abroad and their subjects. What daring of man can, now or in the future, be more foul and wicked than to deny fear to God, affection to good fellow-countrymen (*cives*), honour to those placed in higher authority..?[147]

From the outset of his work, then, Gildas accentuated the link between the island and her citizens. And while the land herself could cause afflict calamities on her citizens, it was an individual's duty to maintain *bonis civibus caritatem*, 'affection to good fellow-citizens'.[148] Gildas would continue to acknowledge the island's indigenous inhabitants as both *gens* and *populus*. It was, however, citizenship of Britain – that Garden of Eden – that marked the population out as different from the other peoples – Roman, Pictish, Scottic and Saxon – who at some time entered or inhabited the Britain envisioned by Gildas in the *DEB*.

The foundation of Gildas's primary identity was Christianity, secured through an emphasis on citizenship and territoriality. These latter two notions in particular, as we have seen, formed the basis of provincial Britishness. As discussed previously, the term *cives* (s. *civis*) had its origins in Roman state nomenclature and from 212 signalled for the imperial

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[147] *DEB*, 4.1.

[148] *DEB*, 4.1.

Britons membership of an empire which dominated the cultural and political landscape of Europe and the Mediterranean.[149] For two centuries prior to the 'ending of Roman Britain' the Britons held citizenship as a defining aspect of their identities, marking them out as different from those unconquered peoples beyond the frontier, a circumstance which perhaps aided the emergence of the Pictish terminology. The importance of citizenship, its vocabulary and legal connotation were thus embedded in late Romano-British secular and religious society and hence it should come as no surprise that Gildas was aware of this term and used it a marker of collective identity. Gildas's supposedly 'provincial' use of *cives* has indeed been understood as an expression of global citizenship, witnessing an identification and affiliation with the Roman empire.[150] Thomas Charles-Edwards, for instance, has suggested that for Gildas *cives* indicated a sense of solidarity 'together with the Romans'.[151]

As Gildas was the product of an education seeped in late antique *romanitas*, we might expect his use of particular terms to signal a sense of cultural and political affiliation to the Roman state. Yet because of a cultural shift engendered by the rise of Christianity and the decline of the empire in Britain and, indeed, the West, Gildas altered the significance, of citizenship and territoriality, deploying them in a post-Roman world where loyalty to and participation in Christianity not a universal empire now stood as the ultimate statement identity. Certainly, Gildas's use of *cives* was no expression of imperial piety: not only were the Romans considered to be another *gens* and thus separate from the Britons but their empire no longer held sway in Britain. Indeed, it is the concept of a Roman *exercitus* rather than a 'Roman Empire' which inhabits the latter stages of the *historia*, matters which cast serious doubt on conceptions of universal citizenship. Gildas's was an isolationist's conception of

[149] Sherwin-White, *Roman Citizenship*, pp. 380-92.

[150] F. Kerlouégan, *Le De Excidio Britanniae de Gildas: Les Destinées de la culture latine dans l'île de Bretagne au Vie siècle* (Paris, 1987), p. 579.

[151] Charles-Edwards, 'Introduction', p. 6.

citizenship. Within Britain the Wall had created the northern limits to citizenship, dividing the *populus*/*cives* and the Picts, and while superficially this might reverberate with the sentiments found in *Historia Augusta* and elsewhere in that these works regarded the *murus*/*vallum* as the division between civility and barbarism the Gildasian Walls were not instruments of imperial control but monuments to Brittonic failure.[152]

Conceptions of citizenship were not of course unique to Gildas: the adaptation of a current and contemporary identity was a more realistic aim than the creation of a new one. But set in the context of other claims of citizenship in late antique Britain, Gildas's intentions become clearer. In the surviving textual material, the most notable figure of Brittonic origin also to deploy the use of citizenship was, of course, Patrick. Although the exact chronology of his career remains a topic of debate, a date for his activities in the mid to late fifth century appears acceptable.[153] In this context, it is the *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, written in to order to reprimand the retinue of Corotius for slave-raiding amongst his flock, which elucidates Patrick's conception of citizenship:

> *Manu mea scripsi atque condidi uerba ista danda et tradenda, militibus mittenda Corotici, non dico ciuibus meis neque ciuibus sanctorum Romanorum, sed ciuibus daemoniorum, ob mala opera ipsorum.*
>
> I have written and composed these words by my own hand that they be given over and delivered, hurled at the soldiers of Coroticus. I do not say 'to my fellow-

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[152] *DEB*, 19.1-2.

[153] J. T. Koch, 'The early chronology for St Patrick (c. 351-c. 428): some new ideas and possibilities', in J. Cartwright (ed.), *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults* (Cardiff, 2003), pp. 102-22; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Floruit of St Patrick – Common and Less Common Ground', in D. N. Dumville (ed.), *St Patrick A.D. 493-1933* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 13-18.

citizens' nor 'to citizens of the saintly Romans', but, on account of their evil work,
'to fellow-citizens of the demons'.[154]

Patrick is regarded as a Briton:[155] as 'fellow-citizens' Coroticus, identified as the ruler of Alt Clut, and his retinue were also 'Britons'.[156] Patrick's conception of citizenship appears therefore to have operated on three intertwined strands: to signal affiliation between fellow Britons; to stand as a common marker of Christian identity; and to act as a link between the Britons and the saintly Romans and Gallo-Romans. Thus Patrick's citizenship integrated the Britons into the wider late antique world, signalling their membership of a pantheon headed by the imperial and Christian Romans.

If, furthermore, Patrick's Coroticus is believed to be the ruler of Alt Clut, as suggested by the chapter headings of Muirchú's Life of Patrick, then his conception of citizenship had expanded to include at least some of the intramural kingships sustained formerly by imperial largesse.[157] On a regional level, Patrick's letter demonstrates individual polities and retinues focussed their loyalties upon 'king and court', perhaps caring little for ideals of national or ethnic identity. Here, perhaps, we have found similarities between Patrick and Gildas, for the former wanted the soldiers of Coroticus to look beyond king and court and recognise their links with fellow-citizens, not to participate in raids with Picts and Scots. Gildas's own concern with the terms *cives*, *Britannia*, and *patria* does, indeed, appear an attempt to supplant the regionality prevalent amongst contemporary kings, who concerned themselves with civil war and the enhancement of their own position at the expense of

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[154] Patrick, *Epistola*, 2, ed. L. Bieler, *Libri Epistolarum Sancti Patricii Episcopi*, 2 vols. Irish Manuscripts Commission, (Dublin, 1952).

[155] Koch, 'St Patrick', p. 3.

[156] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 35-6. The identification has been disputed by A. Orchard, 'Coroticus', in Dumville (ed.), *Saint Patrick*, pp. 107-115.

[157] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 226-7.

fellow-citizens. Thus Gildas demanded his contemporaries to identify themselves first as 'citizens of Britain' not as citizens of their *regiones*, as suggested by the claims articulated on the inscribed stone from Ffestiniog.[158] Be that as it may, Gildas did not attempt to associate his citizens with other groups; the hierarchy to which Patrick appealed, headed by the Romans and including the Gallo-Romans, did not exist for Gildas. True, the Romans had military virtues and acted as the instruments of God but they did not stand at the pinnacle of Christianity: it was Britain's indigenous citizens who were the new Israelites, God's Chosen People and none could surpass this status.

Given that the Picts and Saxons were heathen and condemned as such by Gildas, it is evident that Christianity stood as a hallmark of Brittonic identity. Indeed, the absence of British paganism amongst the failings of his contemporaries suggests that whatever else, the *populus* were defined by their status as Christians. It is interesting in this respect that Gildas says nothing of the contemporary settlement of Irish in southern Wales and Cornwall, of which he would presumably have been aware given his knowledge of the other barbarian settlements. Could he silence be explained, in part, by the Christianisation of Irish settlers or, indeed, their preexisting Christianity which could enrol them as honourary Britons? Whatever the case, Christianity was a fundamental part of Brittonic identity and marked off the *populus*, through use of terms such as *cives*, as well as burial practices as other customes such as the raising of inscribed monuments from intrusive barbarian *gentes*.

Returning to our text, close examination reveals that after appearing in chapter four at the opening of the historical section, *cives* largely disappears from the narrative until it resurfaces after chapter fourteen; prior to this point, apart from one incidence, discussed below, Gildas had been content to describe Britain's indigenous population as either *gens* or

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[158] Cantiorix, *Venedotis cive*: Edwards, *Corpus*, II, MR8, pp. 385-6: see Ch. 5.

populus. This would suggest that Gildas's conception of citizenship was not dictated by Britain's subjection to Rome – rather the island's *populus* only emerge as *cives* in the aftermath of Maximus' tyranny and the departure of Britain's 'mighty youth'.[159] The birth of British citizenship was an evolutionary growth necessitated by the island's vulnerability in the face of barbarian attack; on their return to the island after the failure of Maximus' usurpation the Romans encounter *cives* who required assistance against the Picts and Scots, emphasising again the insular nature of Gildasian citizenship.[160]

The extent to which this vision was held by other members of Gildas's circle and wider audience is unclear – Patrick for one appears to have regarded citizenship as linking the Britons to the Romans and others may have felt the same way. Indeed, though Gildas's references to the citizens' defence of the Wall may have been a new take on Britain's recent history, his notion that the *murus* or *vallum* divided 'Briton' from 'Pict' appears, in some respects, a conservative one, perhaps held previously by segments of the late Roman provincial population, especially amongst communities dwelling at a distance from the frontier. For Gildas the Wall certainly provided a visible point of demarcation which had ruptured Britain's integrity, facilitating rather than hindering the Pictish settlement; indeed, it was a permanent memorial to the military negligence of the 'wretched citizens' (*miserrimi cives*).[161] Beyond the Wall was now Pictish territory, no longer inhabited by the *populus*/*cives*.

The final campaign of the Romans, the return of the *gentes* and the failure of the appeal to Aëtius marks a watershed moment; gone was the reliance on Roman valour, which was replaced by faith in God. Now, victory was achieved against the barbarians through

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[159] *DEB*, 14.

[160] *DEB*, 18.1.

[161] *DEB*, 19.2. '*cives*' is used on four occasions in §19.

'trusting not in man, but in God' (*non fidentes in homine sed in deo*).[162] Defencelessness was thus prerequisite to the *cives*' progression towards salvation, prefaced by a period of vulnerability where only God's protection would prevail. Earlier in his narrative Gildas had revealed that the arrival of Christianity, the 'true sun', had done little to inspire the *populus*, with Christ's message of salvation received without warmth (*tepide suscepta sunt*) by the inhabitants of the spiritually frozen island.[163] Britain's Christians were nonetheless free as yet from the stains of heresy and were persecuted for their faith by the *tyrannus* Diocletian.[164] God thus acted to save Britain, creating martyrs such as Alban, Aaron and Julius, whose tombs, Gildas laments, were now inaccessible to the *cives* due to their sins and the contemporary relations with the barbarians.[165] In his reference to *cives*, Gildas was interjecting his contemporary formulation of identity into the past. Here, then, we have a contemporary situation framed by discussion of past events, not an attempt to project citizenship back into the Roman period. Thus, citizenship, it would appear, was neither a consequence of Britain's incorporation into the Empire nor solely the consequence of the *populus*' conversion. It was the convergence of contemporary political events and the awakening of their spiritual status after the fall of Maximus which engendered the emergence of citizenship as the defining element of insular identity.

The growing significance of Christianity to Gildas's construct, moreover, is apparent in the increasing frequency of biblical quotes and allusions which appear from chapter twenty onwards, a phenomenon which coincides with the abandonment of the island by the Romans

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[162] *DEB*, 20.3.

[163] *DEB*, 9.1.

[164] *DEB*, 9.1.

[165] *DEB*, 10.1-2.

and their failed appeal to Aëtius.[166] Gildas's narrative had advanced Britain's inhabitants from isolation to empire and from paganism to conversion; now, the language used to define them underwent similar developments, transforming from the biblically-inspired *gens* and *populus* to include the distinctive *cives*. Yet the thread which linked past and present remained, particularly in terms of the negative tendencies of the population:

> *recesserunt hostes a civibus nec cives a suis sceleribus*
>
> The enemy retreated from the citizens, but the citizens did not retreat from their sins.[167]

The population's relationship with the Romans had been plagued by their innate characteristics; while these had been an affront to God, the population, abandoned by the Romans, through pursuing their sinful nature now risked direct confrontation with God's wrath. Indeed, there was now no intermediary to suffer the Briton's infidelitites or punish their wickedness as the Romans had done so. Hence following the growth of luxury which had accompanied the defeat of the Picts and Scots God sent the northern *gentes* again in order 'to purge his family' (*purgare familiam suam*) from their sinfulness.[168] Gildas's claim that his fellow citizens were God's *familia* was an overt claim that the *cives* stood at the very pinnacle of earthly peoples: given his attitude towards the barbarians it seems highly doubtful that he considered these *gentes* as belonging to God's family – figuratively speaking, these intrusive populations dwelt outside Gildas's *patria*. In emphasising their unique position, Gildas hoped to influence his audience to once again cherish this exulted status and regain their fatherland.

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[166] Chapters 13-19, where the *populus* and Romans are presented in terms resembling kinship (17.1) are those which contain no allusions to ecclesiastical works, see O'Loughlin, *Gildas and the Scriptures*, pp. 125-53.

[167] *DEB*, 20.3.

[168] *DEB*, 21-22.1.

The population did not respond to the barbarian threat in the correct manner: rather than trusting in God and defending their *patria*, the *superbus tyrannus* and council took the fateful decision to invite the Saxons, 'hated by man and God' to enter the island as a defence against the northern peoples.[169] If the *cives* had continued to trust in God, such human protection would, or should have been, unnecessary and it was thus punishment for such lack of faith which resulted in the rebellion of the Saxon Federates, who ravaged the island from sea to sea.[170] In this scenario, Gildas was forced to present the *cives'* leader, Ambrosius Aurelianus, *vir modestus*, as a Roman (*Romanae gentis*) and *dux* for the indigenous people could not lead their own recovery.[171] Again, Gildas contrasted Roman militaristic valour and political legitimacy with the invalidity of indigenous descent and 'British' political terminology – *tyrannus* and *rex*; indeed, Ambrosius' personal leadership was intended as a contrast with the *superbus tyrannus'* reliance on federates. While then the Saxons represented a significant threat to the *cives*, they were at all times pawns in a wider game, a punishment sent from God to test his people:

> *Ex eo tempore nunc cives, nunc hostes, vincebat, ut in ista gente experiretur dominus solito more praesentem Israelem, utrum diligat eum an non*

> From that time, victory went now to the citizens now to the enemy, so that in this people the lord could make trial (as he tends to) of his latter-day Israel to see whether it loves him or not.[172]

Here the indigenous people are both *cives* and *gens* demonstrating that Gildas continued to conceptualise his near-contemporaries as a population unit distinct from all others. But this

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[169] *DEB*, 23.

[170] *DEB*, 23-24.

[171] *DEB*, 25.3.

[172] *DEB*, 26.1.

group, most importantly, inhabited Britain, the 'latter-day Israel' marking them off as spiritually more significant and, indeed, unique amongst the world's peoples. This trial lasted up until the siege of *mons Badonicus*, an event which assumed lasting importance in Brittonic medieval historiography as perhaps the greatest victory of the Britons over the Saxons. For Gildas, however, God's test did not end with the conclusion of the war, but persisted into the period of peace where luxury and vice threatened the spiritual position of the people and civil war their lives. The Saxons remained a threat and Gildas wanted them expelled from Britain. He was reluctant, however, to urge his fellow countrymen to war; for Gildas was aware that without the *populus*' repentance and acceptance of citizenship of the *patria* as the primary unit of adherence, renewed status as God's *familia* would not occur, thereby preventing any victory over the Saxons.

Conclusion

It has been argued above that Gildasian identity was based upon Christianity and distinguished by reference to the importance of both citizenship and territoriality. Britain was Gildas's primary unit of adherence and identification with the *patria* rather than individual kingships or territories within the *insula* was fundamental to his vision of community. Gildasian Britishness, as one might expect, thus contains echoes of Roman period Britishness. Gildas's Britain, however, was the latter-day Israel; indeed, at the very forefront Gildasian identity stood Christianity and his depiction of the *populus*/*cives* as God's Chosen People – the new Israelites – marked off his fellow-countrymen from all other peoples, Romans and barbarians. Gildas, then, was not the 'last of the Romans' nor a citizen of a global empire; this concept was redundant to him as was Britain's place in the Roman Empire. Rather, Gildas was a Christian citizen of Britain. Adapting the current and contemporary use of citizenship, Gildas created an identity that did not rely on the

widespread literary motif of 'migration', familiar both to Roman and barbarian historians and authors concerned with the origins of peoples. Thus while Gildas saw a familial relationship between the indigenous people of Britain he was not concerned to advocate an ethnic origin which tied the *Britanni* – a term which Gildas hesitated to use – to other peoples of the contemporary and ancient world. Gildas, then, was an author obsessed with creating British Christian identity amongst his contemporaries by directing them to becoming, once again, God's own *familia*.

Insular Christian citizenship thus excluded all other groups from Gildas's providential scheme and while the terms he employed for group identities were familiar to and comparable with other late antique commentators, Roman or barbarian, his vision of community differed markedly in depicting the *populus* as an indigenous group, isolated, unique and unconnected to any other *gentes* all of whom were alien to Britain's shores.

Part II: Regionalism

Chapter 5: Identity and Epigraphic Consciousness

This chapter examines the epigraphic habit amongst the Britons in the Roman and early medieval periods. The argument is arranged into two sections: the first examines the Roman period inscriptions, elucidating the lengths to which *civitas* communities expressed a sense of regional identity through inscriptions. This articulation of regional identity is furthermore compared to other strategies utilised for displaying *civitas* identity, such as the use of mosaic styles amongst the villa dwellers and the role of urban centres. The second section then examines the early medieval inscriptions of western and northern Britain. The raising of inscribed monuments in the post-Roman period was primarily a method through which the deceased were commemorated. However, the second section will further argue that these monuments were also a strategy used to secure elite dominance over the landscape through the creation of dynastic and territorial identities, some of which were based, in part, on identities transferred from the Roman period. It will then go on to suggest that the spread of Christianity and the expansion of the epigraphic habit beyond the former Roman *limes* in the fifth and sixth centuries resulted in the transformation and expansion of the concept of citizenship and the creation of a new Britishness in the early middle ages.

Approaches

The epigraphic record provides one of the most important sources for understanding concepts and expressions of individual and group identity in Roman and late antique Britain. Two data sets exist for studying this phenomenon: the Roman inscriptions of Britain;[1] and the inscribed

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[1] *RIB*, vols. I and III: *Inscriptions on Stone*.

monuments of early medieval western and northern Britain.[2] This material is usually treated separately. In large part this is due to post-Roman inscriptions being seen until recently as a re-introduction from Gaul.[3] However, arguing against previous orthodoxy, Mark Handley has suggested that the proliferation of inscribed funerary monuments in western Britain during the late antique period was a continuation and extension of a Christian commemorative practice which originated in mid- to late-fourth-century Roman Britain, primarily in the form of inscriptions with formulae such as *dis manibus* and *titulum posuit*.[4] Evidence for Christian funerary commemoration in fourth-century Roman Britain is, however, limited; indeed, there are very few fourth-century inscriptions, a number of which are milestones raised under the Constantinian dynasty. Nancy Edwards has, in fact, restated the evidence for the introduction into Britain of the *hic iacit* formula as an innovation inspired by Gaulish links, though possibly with Trier as an origin rather than Lyon or Bordeaux.[5] Western and northern

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[2] Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, I; Edwards, *Corpus*, II and III; V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales*, (Cardiff, 1950); C. Thomas, *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak? Post-Roman Inscriptions in Western Britain* (Cardiff, 1994); M. Handley, 'The Early Medieval Inscriptions of western Britain: function and sociology', in J. Hill and M. Swan (eds), *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns and Power in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 339-61, at 340-9; N. Edwards, 'Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales: Context and Function', *MA* 45 (2001), 15-39. C. Thomas, 'The Early Christian Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', *Glasgow Archaeological Journal* 17 (1991-2), 1-10; K. Forsyth, '*Hic Memoria Perpetua*: The Early Inscribed Stones of Southern Scotland in Context', in S. M. Foster and M. Cross (eds.), *Able Hands and Practised Minds: Scotland's Early Medieval Sculpture in the 21st Century* (Leeds, 2005), pp. 113-34; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 139-68.

[3] Nash-Williams, *ECMW*, pp. 1-17, 55; J. K. Knight, '*In Tempore Iustini Consulis*: Contacts between the British and Gaulish Churches before St Augustine', in A. Detsicas (ed.), *Collectanea Historica. Essays in Memory of Stuart Rigold* (Maidstone, 1981), pp. 54-62; *idem*, 'The Early Christian Latin Inscriptions of Britain and Gaul: Chronology and Context', in N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds.), *The Early Church in Wales and the West* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 45-50, at p. 48; *idem*, 'Seasoned with Salt: Insular-Gallic Contacts in the Early Memorial Stones and Cross Slabs', in K. Dark (ed.), *External Contacts and the Economy of Late and Post-Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 109-20; Thomas, *Stones*, pp. 197-208

[4] M. Handley, 'The origins of Christian commemoration in late antique Britain', *EME* 10 (2001), 177-99, at 183-6.

[5] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, pp. 122-3.

Britain's penchant for the epigraphic habit in the post-Roman period does, nonetheless, need to be seen as part of a wider phenomenon affecting particular areas of late antique Europe and the Mediterranean.[6] Yet while it is possible to accept the notion that Christianity and literacy persisted after the ending of Roman Britain in the early fifth century, the epigraphic habit in itself might still be viewed as a reintroduction inspired by contacts between the insular world and continental Europe and the Mediterranean.

On a broader level, it cannot be denied that the sheer range, function and numbers of the Roman period inscriptions justify, in certain respects, the distinction between the Roman and late antique/early medieval data. The commemoration of acts of architectural munificence, for instance, was in Britain a practice confined to the Roman period.[7] Furthermore, the Roman period evidence indicates that epigraphy was largely utilised by persons of overseas origins and/or with an official state capacity, with the indigenous Romano-British peoples never truly developing an 'epigraphic consciousness' under the empire.[8] Nevertheless, whilst Britain displays some idiosyncrasies in terms of the acceptance and usage of epigraphy, the decline of the epigraphic habit in Roman Britain corresponds to the general decline in the practice which took hold across the Roman empire which dropped from its cultural peak around AD 200 to a near flat-line by the start of the fourth century.[9]

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[6] M. A. Handley, *Death, Society and Culture: Inscriptions and Epitaphs in Gaul and Spain, AD 300-750*, BAR Int. Ser. 1135 (Oxford, 2003), pp. 35-64.

[7] T. F. C. Blagg, 'Architectural Munificence in Britain: The Evidence of Inscriptions', *Britannia* 21 (1990), 13-31, at 19-22.

[8] J. C. Mann, 'Epigraphic Consciousness', *JRS* 75 (1985), 204-6, at 206; D. Mattingly, 'Urbanism, Epigraphy and Identity in the Towns of Roman Britain under Roman rule', in H. Schellenberg, V. Hirschmann, and A. Krieckhaus (eds.), *A Roman Miscellany: Essays in Honor of Anthony R. Birley on his Seventieth Birthday* (Gdansk, 2008), pp. 53-71, at pp. 62, 67.

[9] R. MacMullen, 'The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire', *American Journal of Philology* 103 (1982), 233-246, at 243.

In late antique Britain, indeed, only the practice of inscribing funerary monuments was revived in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. Although Handley would stress that commemorative epigraphy in the west and north of the former Roman diocese represents the continuation of an epigraphic habit established in the Roman period, the groups and individuals participating in these acts were not the same as those who had monopolised the practice during the Roman period. Indeed, as we will see, within the West British zone, the late antique inscriptions present an almost opposite geographical and social distribution to their Roman period predecessors. By that period inscriptions were located, on the whole, at the western peripheries of former *Britannia Prima* away from the military/urban centres at Chester, Caerleon, Gloucester and Cirencester amongst peoples whose ancestors appear not to have maintained an epigraphic consciousness. Likewise in the north, inscriptions were found mostly to the north of the Wall, whereas Roman period inscriptions were mainly the products of military units stationed on the frontier.

It must recognised therefore that new impulses were at work in early medieval Britain, ones which required local groups to accentuate, create or reinvigorate their sense of *romanitas* and other aspects of identity in order to maintain or seize power in the altered circumstances of the fifth and sixth centuries. For instance, these stones are often seen as crucial evidence in the settlement of Irish colonists who began to control large sections of western Britain in the course of the post-Roman period.[10] Here, the opposite distribution of inscribed stones from their Roman period counterparts and probable Irish settlement might be connected, with Irish settlers now, to some degree, fulfilling the role of the Romans in being an inscribing group, who sought to establish themselves within the landscape. However, another important factor was the importance of locally-available suitable stone, which might,

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[10] J. D. Bu'lock, 'Early Christian Memorial Formulae', *AC* 95 (1956), 133-41, at 135-6, 141; Thomas, *Stones*, pp. 41-66; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 157-68.

to some extent, have influenced the pattern of distribution in Wales. Irish influence on the epigraphic habit comes mainly from the form of the inscription, discussed below, or the language itself, ogham. Ogham consisted of a series of incisions made upon the angle or arris of the stone rather than the face of the slab. However, ogham may have originated either in Britain or Ireland, most likely the latter, as an interpretation of Roman script, which Irish communities encountered over the course of the Roman period, no doubt in a variety of mediums, notably through the Church or perhaps potters marks encountered on goods imported from the Mediterranean. However, it is probably precedent which accounts for the absence of Brittonic from the epigraphic habit, Latin being seen as the most suitable language for use on inscriptions, apart from ogham.

Considered in their wider, late antique context, these inscriptions can be viewed as part of a commemorational practice popular in areas of the (former) western provinces where expressing, at least in cultural terms, a connection with *romanitas* and/or the Christian Roman empire was deemed an important marker of identity. This may help explain the survival of roman capitals as the script for inscriptions, with the existing Roman period inscriptions forming the basis for emulation, as well as contemporary influence stemming from Gaul and the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the late antique inscriptions of western and northern Britain can also be viewed as the adoption of a new elite strategy which created and displayed status through peer-competition and conspicuous consumption of resources, both natural and human. Indeed, these were intertwined strands of a single thread which created for individuals and groups links with an 'imagined' ancestral past and claims of hereditary right over lands, some of which might have been acquired recently, possibly through conquest and settlement. Taken as a whole, therefore, the Roman and late antique inscriptions allow us to draw contrasts and comparisons between the contexts in which expressions and

conceptions of group identities took place and, in particular, offer an insight into how group identities persisted, declined and transformed across this period.

Roman Britain

In Roman Britain, epigraphy was a social and cultural practice used most extensively by the military and urban communities. The habit was confined primarily to larger urban locations, such as diocesan and provincial capitals, and legionary fortresses; it was virtually absent from the smaller *civitas* 'capitals' and rural sites.[11] Areas with the most pronounced epigraphic consciousness were those most intimately connected with state politics and interaction with the emperor and/or his officials and armies, where displays of imperial piety and *romanitas* were viewed as essential acts by both the commemorator(s) and their audience.[12] Legionary fortresses and other military installations seemingly acted as bastions of *romanitas*. Thus as might be expected, the three western British sites with the most pronounced epigraphic consciousness were, respectively, the legionary fortresses at Chester (146 – the highest number of stone inscriptions for the entire British diocese), and Caerleon (106), followed by Cirencester, the provincial capital of *Britannia Prima* (28).[13] In the north, York (89) forms a centre for epigraphy, with the Wall and its hinterland another epigraphic hotspot. Here, dedications to emperors or imperial officials,[14] along with altars dedicated to local, imported or hybrid deities were commonplace.[15]

The epigraphic habit often manifested itself as recording an act of architectural munificence – that is, dedicating the construction or restoration of state or public buildings

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[11] As, indeed, even the most cursory perusal of *RIB* would indicate; Mann, 'Epigraphic habit', 204-6.

[12] Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, pp. 82-91; MacMullen, 'The Epigraphic Habit', 246.

[13] Mattingly, 'Urbanism, Epigraphy and Identity', Tab. 1, p. 58.

[14] E.g. *RIB*, 905: dedication to emperor Caracalla (Old Carlisle, AD 213).

[15] E.g. *RIB*, 1700: alter to Volcanus (Vindolanda).

connected to the prosperity of the imperial regime. The individual responsible would often commemorate himself/herself (usually men in official positions) and the emperor, or imperial official, under whose authority such work took place. At Caerleon, for example, a dedication slab was raised to the honour of the emperors Severus and Antoninus and the Caesar, Geta.[16] The epigraphic record at Chester is similarly replete with imperial pronouncements and building inscriptions such as that raised for the prosperity (*pro salute*) of the unnamed emperors by the military tribune of the Twentieth Legion.[17] Restoration of public buildings, particularly religious sites of local and imperial significance was also conducted by civilians in an urban context. For instance, a certain Antonius Lucretianus clearly wished his contemporaries and later generations to be fully aware that it was he who had restored, in the late first/early second century, the Shrine of the *Matres* at Winchester.[18] As an act of conspicuous consumption, this practice advertised the status of the benefactor and signalled their adherence to and interaction with the formal hierarchy of which they were part.

Funerary inscriptions are the second major Roman period epigraphic category. The raising of inscribed funerary monuments was practised most intensely by military and urban communities. Again, this was a demonstration of both the deceased's and the commemorator's place within Roman society.[19] Sometimes an accompaniment to sculpture, these inscriptions were used to create and display various aspects of individual status and identity. Perhaps most notable was the desire amongst the commemorators to announce the

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[16] *RIB*, 326; see also, 330, 331, 332, 333.

[17] *RIB*, 450.

[18] *RIB*, 88.

[19] R. P. Saller and B. D. Shaw, 'Tombstone and Roman Family Relations in the Principate: Civilians, Soldiers and Slaves', *JRS* 74 (1984), 124-56, at 135-9; V. M. Hope, 'Words and Pictures: The Interpretation of Romano-British Tombstones', *Britannia* 28 (1997), 245-58, at 254-8.

deceased's acquisition of Roman citizenship.[20] In early imperial Dorchester, for instance, an inscription raised by his wife and children remembers a certain Carinus, as *ciues Romanus*.[21] Various other aspects of personal and familial identity, whether it was the status of an individual as a soldier, father, wife or husband, were recorded on funerary monuments. Moreover, commemoration by heirs, whether this be a child or children, wife, husband, freedman, military unit or guild, provides valuable information for reconstructing family relations during the Roman period, at least amongst a certain section of society.[22]

In terms of personal identity, however, *origo* – a statement of personal origin and therefore belonging – was an element considered central to funerary commemoration; indeed, it seems that it was often the wish of the departed, or those that remembered them, to record the deceased's *origo* as an integral part of their identity. For instance, amongst the legionaries of Chester the probably third-century memorial of one Flavius Longus of *legio XX* stated *eius domo Samosta*, 'his home was Samosta' on the Upper Euphrates.[23] Moreover, one Marcus Aurelius Alexander, *praefectus castrorum*, was of similarly exotic origins, remembered on his probably third-century memorial as being of the *natione Syrus Osroeneus*.[24] Funerary monuments at Caerleon tell a similar story. Here, the presence of an incumbent legion introduced a huge immigrant population alongside the indigenous Silures, including Titus Flavius Candidus who hailed from Ulpia Trajana, modern Xanten, a town in the North Rhine-Westphalia area of Germany[25] and Gaius Valerius Victor of Lugdunum, Lyons.[26] These

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[20] E. A. Meyer, 'Explaining the Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire: The Evidence of Epitaphs', *JRS* 80 (1990), 74-96, at 89.

[21] *RIB*, 188.

[22] Numerous inscriptions from the military community (e.g. *RIB*, 500, 501, 502, 505) were raised by the deceased's *heres*, whether this was their child, wife or freedman.

[23] *RIB*, 450.

[24] *RIB*, 490.

[25] *RIB*, 357

funerary monuments are difficult to date precisely but a date sometime in the second or third centuries would seem possible. Overseas origins were not always declared; other soldiers or veterans opted for identification with the *legio* rather than stating their *origo*,[27] though this was perhaps an indication of origins from within the embedded military community rather than amongst the local Romano-British population.

Legionaries were of course Roman citizens. Pre-212 auxiliary troopers gained this privilege on the completion of twenty-five years' service. Nonetheless, citizenship of a different variety appears to have been important amongst non-Roman soldiers, who evidently regarded themselves as 'citizens' of their respective *gens* or *natio*. Amongst those interred in Cirencester's cemetery were individuals commemorated as *ciues* of the Raurici of *Germania Superior*, the Frisians of Germania, and of the Sequani of the upper Saône Valley in Gaul.[28] This also applies in the north. For instance, one Marcus Verecundius Diogenes was *ciues Biturix Cubus*, 'a citizen of the Biturges Cubi'.[29] Throughout the northern frontier zone, indeed, there were persons of various origins expressing their regional affiliation through citizenship: on the Antonine frontier we find soldiers of *legio VI* describing themselves as *ciues Italici et Norici*, 'citizens of Italy and Noricum'.[30] On Hadrian's Wall, there were citizens of Noricum,[31] and of the Tuihanti[32] – that is, the people of the Twenthe region of modern Holland. At Birrens there were Raetian citizens serving in the Second Cohort of Tungrians.[33]

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[26] *RIB*, 365.

[27] *RIB*, 357.

[28] *RIB*, 108, 109, 110.

[29] *RIB*, 678.

[30] *RIB*, 2148.

[31] *RIB*, 1433.

[32] *RIB*, 1593-4.

[33] *RIB*, 2100.

Individual soldiers, whether legionaries or auxiliaries, could be remembered through statements of origin or citizenship as members of different ethnic or regional populations. What must be stressed, moreover, is that these inscriptions date from the second and third centuries, and that whilst they demonstrate the exotic origins of at least a proportion of the military and civilian communities in Britain in that era, it is likely that by the later Roman period distinctions between 'natives' and 'newcomers' were less relevant with status and identity within local contexts of greater importance; indeed, apart from exceptional graves such as those from Lankhills, Winchester, it is extremely difficult in the absence of funerary inscriptions to identify persons of foreign extraction in Romano-British cemeteries without scientific analysis.[34]

The *Civitates*

Throughout the Empire, the *civitates* were the building-blocks of Roman provincial governance, being comprised of an urban 'capital' and a surrounding rural hinterland.[35] Within the *civitates*, power was the prerogative of an *ordo* or *curia* made of up of the local landowning aristocrats, termed *decuriones* or *curiales*. From a judicial perspective, the *decuriones* were a single social class; however, variation in the size and splendour of urban and rural dwellings from *Britannia Prima* suggests that this class, as elsewhere in the empire, were divergent in terms of wealth and power.[36] Membership of the *curia* by the third century was in practice hereditary, although the state was forced through repeated legislation to compel those obliged to serve to perform their civic duty; however, due to the burdens placed

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[34] G. Clarke, *The Roman Cemetery at Lankhills. Pre-Roman and Roman Winchester Part II*, Winchester Studies 3 (Oxford, 1979), pp. 377-87, 389-99; R. Baldwin, 'Intrusive Burial Groups in the Late Roman Cemetery at Lankhills, Winchester – A Reassessment of the Evidence', *OJA* 4 (1985), 93-104.

[35] Jones, *LRE*, I, pp. 712-14; Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, pp. 65-103; Mattingly, *Imperial Possession*, pp. 260-86.

[36] Jones, *LRE*, I, pp. 737-57, at pp. 737-8.

upon *decuriones*, particularly in terms of their liability for the collection and underwriting of taxation and other governmental functions, these obligations were frequently resisted by those with the wealth and influence to do so.[37] Participation in regional governance could, at times, still be beneficial and exerting power in a local context was an important method by which the local elites upheld their status and identity.[38] Although perhaps writing in post-Roman Britain, St Patrick indicates quite clearly that expressing the decurional status of one's forbears was an important mark of social identity.[39] Patrick's family, then, possessed hereditary authority based upon their social roles as *decuriones* and priests; however, there is little sense as to how this power related, if at all, to wider concepts of identity based upon Roman period *civitas* groupings. Of course, these concepts may have mattered little to Patrick in the context of his writings or indeed in his life in general; however, elsewhere in the late Roman world we are offered a glimpse of what membership of a regional grouping meant to the Roman aristocrat.

Within the British *civitates* it is predominantly amongst the decurional class that we might expect the use of the epigraphic habit. However, the Demetae, Durotriges, Dumnonii, Ordovices, Silures, Cornovii, Dobunni and Deceangli, have left almost no meaningful legacy in the epigraphic record. Outside the inscriptional hotspots of Chester, Caerleon, and Cirencester, and other important places, such as Bath, this practice was virtually unknown. The Mediterranean civic ideal envisioned towns as the arenas in which demonstrations of power amongst rival families or prestigious individuals were manifested in the construction of public amenities.[40] This was reinforced through the raising of inscriptions proclaiming the

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[37] Jones, *LRE*, I, pp. 748-52.

[38] Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, pp. 65-6.

[39] JKoch, 'St Patrick', p. 110-115.

[40] Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, p. 137; Jones, *LRE*, I, pp. 42-53.

efforts of the individual or family responsible for such improvements. The urban Romano-British elite appear not to have participated fully in this practice.

Nor were Romano-British elites or indigenous urban dwellers more widely motivated to commemorate the deaths of their kinspersons. Within western urban 'centres' monumental funerary inscriptions indicate that it was predominantly military personnel rather than the local civilian communities who were remembered in this fashion. Of the nine inscriptions recovered from the Silurian 'capital' at *Venta Silurum* (Caerwent), for instance, only one may be a tombstone, probably commemorating a soldier of the Second Legion.[41] A similar pattern is evident from *Viroconium* (Wroxeter), '*civitas*-capital' of the Cornovii. Here, six out of the nine tombstones commemorate soldiers.[42] Even the remaining three 'civilian' tombstones are likely to have been non-combatant members of the military community.[43] Of the three remaining *civitas* capitals in western Britain, Exeter has no inscriptions, Carmarthen two,[44] and Dorchester four, only one of which is funerary and belongs to Carinus, a Roman citizen, as discussed above.[45] In part, the indigenous communities' reluctance to adopt the epigraphic habit perhaps signals cultural resistance to the empire; however, this reticence may reflect their unwillingness to participate in a form of competitive social display which had little application within their own society, particularly amongst groups on the western peripheries of the diocese where contact with the imperial government, let alone the emperor, was, to say the least, rare if non-existent.

Despite the Britons' general lack of enthusiasm for epigraphy, *civitates* or individuals belonging to certain *civitates* did on occasion engage in this practice. These monuments

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[41] *RIB*, 309-15, 3076-7 - tombstone no. 312.

[42] *RIB*, 291-4, 296, 3144.

[43] *RIB*, 295-7.

[44] *RIB*, 412-3.

[45] *RIB*, 188-90, 3047, 3519 (milestone).

correspond to the broader cultural and political impulses, outlined above, which conditioned use of the epigraphic habit across the empire. For instance, in the third century the *civitas Silurum* at Caerwent dedicated a statue with an inscription to one Tiberius Claudius Paulinus, former legate of *Legio II Augusta*, based at Caerleon.[46] In part this was a pragmatic response to the presence of an incumbent legion on their doorstep. However, the personal dedication to Paulinus suggests this monument was a shrewd political manoeuvre on behalf of the local community to secure Paulinus' favour and patronage, or perhaps a response to previous support. Either way, it demonstrates the Silures participation in regional imperial politics. Similarly, the *civitas Cornoviorum*'s dedication of their completed forum-basilica complex to the emperor Hadrian (117-138),[47] possibly on the occasion of his personal visit to Wroxeter sometime between the winter of 129 and the autumn of 130, was the measured response of a local community who wished to signal their adherence to the imperial regime and the person of the emperor.

Milestones also provide some insight into the participation of regional groups in local imperial society. A milestone from the small Dobunnic town of *Magnis*, Kenchester, subsequently built into the north wall of the town, had originally been dedicated to the emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180) by the *res publica civitatis Dobunnorum*, the canton of the Dobunni.[48] The *res publica Belgarum* are also known from a milestone from South Wonston (Hants.).[49] Although a rather mundane form of public display, milestones were the responsibility either of the Roman military or of the local civilian community, with these examples demonstrating Dobunnic and Belgic participation in imperial society.

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[46] *RIB*, 311.

[47] *RIB*, 288.

[48] *RIB*, 2250.

[49] *RIB*, 3516.

This meagre total underscores the *civitas* communities' general lack of interest in epigraphy and their political marginality, both within Britain and the empire as a whole. Reference to western *civitates* can nonetheless be supplemented by examples from the northern frontier zone. The *civitas Durotrigum Lindiniensis*, for instance, is commemorated, on three inscriptions from Hadrian's Wall, two recovered from near Cawfields,[50] and a third was found 'somewhere west of Housesteads'.[51] Similarly, two inscriptions from the Wall commemorate the *civitas Dumnoniorum*, one found 'near Carvoran'[52] and another 'a little east of Thirlwall Castle'.[53] Another records the presence of the Catuvellaunian *civitas* at Howgill on the Wall.[54] A second- or third-century date seems appropriate for these inscriptions. Given the lack of inscriptions from within these *civitates* it is normally considered that these civilian communities were either epigraphically illiterate or disinterested in such Roman habits. However, it is interesting that inscriptions from the continent record the presence of individuals from the Dummnonian, Catuvellaunian, Belgic, Cornovian and Dobunnic cantons in Roman Europe.[55] The continental evidence suggests these groups or individuals from these cantons were capable of exhibiting an epigraphic consciousness in the appropriate social context. This clearly extended to their activities in the northern frontier zone where it was a commonality for those engaged in the construction or repair of military installations, most often the soldiery themselves, to inscribe their achievements.[56] These groups conformed to the dominant social practices common to the region and context in which they found themselves.

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[50] *RIB*, 1672; 3376.

[51] *RIB*, 1673.

[52] *RIB*, 1843.

[53] *RIB*, 1844.

[54] *RIB*, 1962.

[55] Ivleva, 'Remembering Britannia', p. 227, tab. 5.

[56] Examples are legion: *RIB*, 2051, 2052 for two instances.

Further examples of conformity to local practice are evident from the inscriptions of persons being attributed origins amongst the *civitates* of western Britain by their commemorators. When dying in the northern frontier zone, some inscriptions gave the *origo* of the deceased as belonging to a Romano-British canton, a habit practised widely by the military but also amongst civilians in foreign lands. Contrary to what Handley suggests, the inscriptions described below were not raised for the 'local civilian inhabitants' of the region.[57] Indeed, the very opposite appears to have been the case. At the Roman fort at Ilkley in the West Riding of Yorkshire, for instance, a sandstone tomb with the relief of a woman seated in a round-backed chair commemorates a daughter (*filia*) remembered in a partially illegible inscription as *c Cornouia*, 'a citizen of Cornovia'.[58] Similarly, at the Roman fort at Templebrough, near Rotherham, south Yorkshire, one Excingus raised a carved relief to his wife, Verecunda Rufilia, a *ciues Dobunun*, 'a citizen of the Dobunni'.[59] Here, then we have funerary monuments recording individual citizenship of a Romano-British *civitas*, an indication that indigenous persons were quite capable of participating in 'normal' modes of Roman behaviour in the appropriate context. We cannot tell whether these women were married to Dobunnic and Cornovian men. It is nonetheless possible, despite the tiny size of the sample that the preponderance of women in these memorials relates to ideas of female status and identity amongst the Romano-British peoples; certainly daughter- and wifehood appear to have been honoured identities given the expense necessary to produce such a monument.[60]

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[57] Handley, 'The origins', 180.

[58] *RIB*, 639.

[59] *RIB*, 621.

[60] Cf. the monument (*RIB*, 1065) from South Shields to Regina, freed-woman of the Catuvellauni married to Barates the Palmyrene.

These funerary inscriptions, of course, speaks of the relative importance of Britishness amongst the Romano-British cantons: such an ethnic/provincial identity could have existed, but it was still important to stress regional origins in the third century – that is, for a Dobunnic or Cornovian individual, Brigantia could to some extent be considered a foreign land. For our purposes, then, perhaps the most significant aspect of these monuments is their reference to regional citizenship. Collingwood and Wright translated *ciues* in these instances as 'tribeswoman', as they had done elsewhere when persons of 'non-Roman' origin were commemorated as *ciues* of a certain ethnic group.[61] This is somewhat misleading as on inscriptions commemorating individuals claiming Roman citizenship or holding official governmental positions Collingwood and Wright translate *ciues* as 'citizens'.[62] Indeed, this arbitrary distinction is sometimes repeated.[63] However, it has unfortunate and misleading connotations that despite the very Roman-ness of their activities, these individuals, and by extension their commemorators, were somewhat less than Roman. Regardless of their origins, commemoration through epigraphic monumentality was surely a 'Roman' practice. Indeed, expressing regional citizenship as an aspect of personal identity appears to have been of great significance to the commemorators and, probably, the deceased. Regional citizenships should, then, be seen, after the Edict of 212, as complementing imperial citizenship as two elements of an intertwined whole, both capable of being expressed in an imperial context.

Within the northern frontier zone, the local British peoples, as with their counterparts in the west, are underrepresented in the epigraphic record. There are some interesting inscriptions, however. For instance, the Textoverdi, a people of the South Tyne valley, are commemorated on a second- or third-century altar set up at Vindolanda by the *curia*

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[61] E.g. *RIB*, 108, 109, 110, where the deceased are described as 'tribesmen' of their respective peoples.

[62] E.g. *RIB*, 188, 103.

[63] Handley, 'The origins', 180.

Textoverdorum.[64] The Parisi of Humberside honoured the emperor Antoninus through the construction of a stage (*proscaenium*), built at the personal expense of one Marcus Ulpius Januarius, aedile of Peturia (Brough-on-Humber).[65] The Brigantes are attested completing building work on Hadrian's Wall between Castlesteads and Stanwix, though whether as a corvee detached from the *civitas* or because this section of the Wall was in their territory is unclear.[66] One Nectovelius of the Second Thracian Cohort was remembered on his tombstone as being *nationis Brigan,* 'of the Brigantian nation'.[67] It is possible, however, that he was from the Raetian Brigantes rather than those of Yorkshire and the Pennines.

Lastly, the Carvetii are named on three surviving inscriptions. The name Carvetii appears on an undated tombstone of a decurion from Old Penrith, which identifies the deceased as a senator of the *civitas Carvetiorum*.[68] The remaining two are both milestones: the first, from Brougham, raised by the *civitas Carvetiorum* in honour of the Gallic emperor, Postumus (*c.* 259-268);[69] and the second from Temple Sowerby honouring Severus Alexander (222-235).[70] As with the Dobunnic and Belgic milestones, those raised by the Carvetii signalled their participation in imperial society through declaring their adherence to the current emperor. As Carvetian territory is virtually free of non-military high-status 'Roman' buildings,[71] these monuments represent a significant investment in the provincial landscape. Nevertheless, despite the conformity of these inscriptions to the wider epigraphic

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[64] *RIB*, 1965.

[65] *RIB*, 707.

[66] *RIB*, 2022.

[67] *RIB*, 2142.

[68] *RIB*, 933.

[69] *RIB*, 3525.

[70] *RIB*, 3526.

[71] See Ch. 7.

practice, the small number of inscriptions raised by the Brittonic peoples of northern Britain suggests a similar disinclination to those in the rest of the Roman Britain.

Amongst the *civitates*, lack of interest in the epigraphic habit could perhaps indicate cultural resistance to Rome. More significant, however, would be the marginality of these communities from the major impulses of imperial Roman society, particularly visits from the imperial court or other high status officials. While the evidence is meagre, regional *civitas* identities appear to have been significant, particularly with respect to individuals when outside their *patria*, suggesting that other types of behaviour and interaction existed to perpetuate these regional identities in a local context. Evidence from late antique Gaul, in particular the writings of Sidonius Apollinaris (d. 489), the late fifth-century Gallic nobleman and Bishop of the Arverni, might provide a useful parallel.

Here, Sidonius suggests that membership of a regional population – in his case, the *populus Avernus* – was integral to elite status amongst the southern Gallic aristocracy.[72] Membership of the *populus Arvernus* appears to have been centred on the *boni*, 'good men' or *nobiles*, 'nobility', a socio-political and cultural grouping centred on a clique of aristocratic men and women residing within the Auvergne. For instance, Sidonius wrote to his friend and brother-in-law Ecdicius, son of the emperor Avitus, claiming in reference to Seronatus's dalliance with Euric's Goths that, *duo nunc pariter mala sustinent Arverni tui*, 'Your Arverni now have to put up with two evils together'.[73] More specifically, Sidonius could claim, again in a letter to Ecdicius, to the longing that *meis Arvernis*, 'my Arvernians' had for the return of their champion.[74] Indeed, the Gallic emperor Avitus could be addressed

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[72] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep*. VII, 7.2-6. On Sidonius, see J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome AD 407-485* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 224-5

[73] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep*. II, 1.1.

[74] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep*. III, 3.1.

during Sidonius' panegyric as *Arverne*, 'O Arvernian', stressing his connection to the ancestral identity.[75] In Britain there existed, of course, no senatorial elite of equivalent status to Sidonius and his kindred. Equally, no comparable literary evidence testifies to the existence of the *populus Durotrigum*, the *populus Dobunnorum* or indeed any other late Roman *civitas* group. Nevertheless, the cultural pursuits of Sidonius and others like him appear to have been popular amongst British aristocrats also, and this may provide a suitable starting point for comparison.

Villas

In particular, the use of villas as a method through which to extol status and identity within the *civitas* appears to have been particularly important within the Durotrigan and Dobunnic *civitates*, and to a lesser extent amongst the Cornovii and Silures. Ancient sources distinguished between the sophisticated rural dwelling (*villa urbana*) and the simple farmhouse (*villa rustica*).[76] In modern British academic literature, however, 'villa' has come to be defined as a 'rural building of Roman aspect'.[77] Despite variation in size and splendour, the unifying features of villas, such as mosaics, baths, tessellated floors, marble-wall veneers, painted plaster, sculptured columns and the ground-plan, distinguished these buildings from other rural buildings in late Roman Britain.[78] Villa proprietorship was founded upon tenurial control and the ability to extract agricultural surplus, with villas often seen as the centres of rural estates.[79] The construction of villas reached its height in the earlier fourth-century

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[75] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Car*. VI.149.

[76] Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession*, pp. 369-70; K. Dark and P. Dark, *The Landscape of Roman Britain* (Stroud, 1997), p. 43; S. Scott, 'Elites, Exhibitionism and the Society of the Late Roman Villa', in Christie (ed.), *Landscape of Change*, pp. 39-66, at p. 40; Branigan, *The Roman Villa in South-West England*, pp. 9-10; Esmonde Cleary, *ERB*, p. 41; Collingwood, *Archaeology of Roman Britain*, pp. 113-36.

[77] Dark and Dark, *Landscape*, p. 43.

[78] Dark and Dark, *Landscape*, p. 43.

[79] Dark and Dark, *Landscape*, p. 71; Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, p. 203.

Britain, just as with the imperial heartlands of Italy and Sicily.[80] Amongst some rural Romano-British elites, such as those in the Durotrigan and Dobunnic *civitates*, this might reflect a deepening relationship with, or attachment to, the imperial regime.[81] Elite expenditure on domestic architecture coincided with, or perhaps resulted in, the neglect of urban centres as theatres for the display and articulation of status and identity. Nonetheless, villas were usually located within easy reach of the *civitas*-capitals or the more important smaller towns.[82] Participation in the administration, politics and social life of the *civitas* thus remained central to elite status, particularly as villas and towns were connected intimately through the taxation system.[83] However, it is certainly the case that architectural and living standards at Romano-British villas went into a period of decline and neglect towards the end of the fourth century, if not before.[84]

If the Britons were apathetic towards the social use of epigraphy in the earlier Roman period, villa-dwelling within certain cantons might demonstrate membership of the *civitas* identity. In particular, the production and distribution of mosaic styles within specific *civitates* appears to have been one method of articulating regional *civitas* identities, as suggested by Millet:

> A potential explanation for this lies in the significance of their use of particular
> sets of artistic forms as symbols to express membership of a particular tribal
> group. In this case, the symbolic significance of the patterns as expressions of
> social identity may have been more important than their monetary or decorative

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[80] Scott, 'Exhibitionism', pp. 40-1, 44-7. Cf. A. C. Arnau, 'Interpreting the Transformation of Late Roman Villas: The Case of *Hispania*', in Christie (ed.), *Landscapes of Change*, pp. 67-102, at pp. 69-74.

[81] The 'Golden Age' of Constantinian dynastic stability: see Ch. 3.

[82] Branigan, *The Roman Villa*, pp. 21-8; Scott, *Art and Society*, Ch. 4; White, *Britannia Prima*, Tab. 6.1, p. 124.

[83] Esmonde Cleary, *ERB*, pp. 72-4, 138-61; Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, pp. 124-6; Wickham, *Framing*, pp. 309-10.

[84] See below.

value. Occasional examples of the styles outside their home territory (especially in towns) may then be interpreted as tribal expatriates expressing their continued allegiance to their home group in a way seen amongst many contemporary Europeans.[85]

Millet's theory has been criticised for its 'simple correlation between symbols and social groups'.[86] Moreover, his use of the term 'tribal' seems at odds with the sophisticated cultural identities expressed through mosaic design. Nonetheless, while we might reject the correlation between symbol X and group Y, the repetition of mosaic types (even in the broadest artistic terms) within a limited geographical area suggests that concepts of communal space and kinship and clientship were related through possession of such mosaics.

Within *Britannia Prima*, the most important mosaic schools, the Corinian Orpheus School (300-320) and the Corinium Saltire School (340/50-370+), were situated at Cirencester, the capital of the Dobunnic *civitas*.[87] Products of the Corinium schools have been found at villas in other *civitates*, such as at Llantwit Major amongst the Silures, highlighting the importance of provincial identities at an intra-*civitas* level. It is, however, the localised distribution of Corinium mosaics which is most striking. Naturally enough, rich townhouses in Cirencester were adorned with mosaics from these 'schools'; however, around forty examples adorn villas throughout the Dobunnic *civitas*, including Orpheus mosaics from Barton Farm, Woodchester and Withington and Saltire mosaics from Chedworth, North Leigh and Tockington Park.[88]

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[85] Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, p. 176.

[86] Scott, *Art and Society*, p. 76.

[87] Scott, *Art and Society*, pp. 29-43; White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 92-3; D. J. Smith, 'Roman Mosaics in Britain: a synthesis', in F. Campanati (ed.), *Atti del III Colloquio Internazionale sul Mosaico Antico 1980* (Ravenna, 1984), pp. 357-80; Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, p. 175.

[88] Jones and Mattingly, *Atlas*, Map 6:41.

Amongst the Durotriges there were mosaic schools at Dorchester, the 'Durnovarian School', and Ilchester, the 'Lindinis School'. The Durnovarian School produced mosaics installed in Dorchester townhouses, hinterland villas such as Wynford, Frampton and Dewlish, and rural villas such as Fifehead Neville and Hinton St Mary.[89] Products of the Lindinis School, active in the middle decades of the fourth century, have been identified at, for example, Low Ham, Keynsham, Lufton, East Coker and Pitney.[90] In fact, Ilchester and its surrounding villas have been identified as an elite 'small world' in which the villa dwellers were a tightly-knit community with common interests and outlooks.[91] Cross-fertilization also occurred between the two groups: Fifehead Neville villa, for example, appears to have contained products of both schools. Interestingly, within the Durotrigan *civitas* the distribution of Durnovarian and Lindinis mosaics corresponds with the fifth-century circulation of the locally-made Black Burnished Ware.[92] Although once found as far distant as the Wall, in the later period dissemination of this pottery was confined to its area of production, suggesting it was distributed primarily within the canton.

Villas certainly invoke the spirit of *romanitas* and in terms of providing an indication of the importance of group identities offer a useful counterpoint to the lack of epigraphic evidence in the later Roman period. As a statement of power, expenditure on a private residence built, to a lesser or greater extent, to 'Roman' cultural and architectural standards, was an act of conspicuous consumption articulating the *romanitas* of the villa-dwellers' identity. Ostentation and *romanitas* were nonetheless proportional to the individual proprietor

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[89] Jones and Mattingly, *Atlas*, Map 6:41.

[90] P. Johnson, 'The Ilchester Lindinis Officina', *Mosaic* 8 (1983), 5-8; S. Cosh, 'The Lindinis branch of the Corinium saltire officina', *Mosaic* 16 (1989), 14-19; Scott, *Art and Society*, p. 51.

[91] Gerrard, *Ruin of Roman Britain*, pp. 233-6.

[92] J. R. L. Allen and M. G. Fulford, 'The Distribution of South-East Dorset Black Burnished Category I Pottery in South-West Britain', *Britannia* 27 (1996), 223-81; J. Gerrard, 'Finding the Fifth Century: A Late Fourth- and Early Fifth-Century Pottery Fabric from South-East Dorset', *Britannia* 41 (2010), 293-412.

and the nature of settlement and society within the respective *civitas*. In the Demetian and Silurian *civitates* villas or residences with some characteristic features of villas, such as Whitton (Glamorgan) were rarer features of the settlement pattern. Nonetheless, structures such as Whitton or Castle Tump were likely to have been perceived as potent symbols of status and identity. In the Dobunnic and Durotrigan *civitates* the greater number of villas no doubt spurred individuals to compete with one another in the creation of the most elaborate domestic architecture. As these *civitates* stood at the heart of *Britannia Prima* and thus were connected closely to the provincial government and imperial regime, this outpouring of civilian *romanitas* was probably to be expected.

At the high-end of the scale, villas such as Chedworth and Woodchester identified their occupants as persons able and willing to expend vast resources, both material and human, on the creation and elaboration of domestic architecture. Woodchester, for instance, with its sixty-four rooms arranged around two or three spacious courtyards, one of which featured a Corinian Orpheus mosaic – currently the largest mosaic known in Britain – was the residence of an extremely important individual, one whose identity social power, cultural affinities, wealth and status were connected very much to the Roman state.[93] However, it is unnecessary to equate such display with the presence of an intrusive, continental elite who had usurped the position of the native aristocracy: the first-century villa at Fishbourne, Sussex, for example, demonstrates that the construction of palatial residences secured and emphasised the status of local elites rather than undermining it.[94] Analogy with Fishbourne would, indeed, suggest that Woodchester was the residence of (former) Dobunnic 'royalty', a group whose status was buttressed through the imposition of Roman rule and their

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[93] Clarke, 'Woodchester', 206-7.

[94] B. Cunliffe, *Excavations at Fishbourne 1961-1969*, 2 vols. Research Reports Soc. Antiq. 36 and 37 (London, 1971), I, p. 153; Henig, *The Heirs of King Verica*, pp. 48-51.

willingness to adapt their identities to the social, cultural and political trends prevalent in imperial society.

Aristocrats maintained the distinction between themselves and the peasantry in various ways, the most important of which was *otium*, leisure – that is, the ability to partake in cultural and social activities, such as patronage, the hosting and attendance of social gatherings, as well as 'practical' activities such as the touring of estates and hunting (all of which continued to be important in the post-Roman world).[95] Sidonius reveals that education, in particular intimate knowledge of classical literature, such as the *Aeneid* and the poetry of more recent authors such as Claudian, truly defined civilian aristocratic identity.[96] But this knowledge had a practical application within the late antique aristocratic network, both in regional and imperial contexts: Sidonius claimed that the Arverni descended from the Trojans, dignifying their ancestry and accentuating their position in the hierarchy of provincial peoples through illustrating their kinship with the Latins of Rome.[97] An argument has also been made that the kingships of the immediately pre-Roman period were cultivating links with the classical past and present.[98] The ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* claims the Britons were also descended from the Trojans.[99] Writing after the collapse of imperial rule in Britain, Gildas displayed familiarity with Vergil.[100] Despite the dearth in literary material

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[95] Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 1-12; T. M. O'Sullivan, 'The Mind in Motion: Walking and Metaphorical Travel in the Roman Villa', *Classical Philology* 101 (2006), 133-52. On post-Roman culture, see Y. Hen, *Roman Barbarians: The Royal Court and Culture in the Early Medieval West* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 3-26.

[96] Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, pp. 47, 52; Kelly, 'Sidonius and Claudian', pp. 175-89; R. W. Mathisen, *Roman Aristocracies in Barbarian Gaul: Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition* (Austin, 1993), pp. 9-16, 105-18.

[97] Sidonius, *Ep*. III.2.1.

[98] Creighton, *Coins and Power*, pp. 101-17.

[99] *HB*, §10. For justification of *Historia Brittonum*'s ninth century date, see Introduction.

[100] See Ch. 4, p. 152.

associated with the late Romano-British nobility, the evidence would suggest that regional groups desirous to do so could create kinship links with the Roman cultural and historical past. It may not be coincidental that the Dobunnic and Durotrigan *civitates* not only demonstrate a particular fondness for classical-based mosaics,[101] but are proposed locations for Gildas's education and place of writing.[102] Similar tastes are evident in the Silurian and Cornovian *civitates*, where the villas of Llantwit Major and Yarchester possessed mosaics with classical designs.

Mosaics, however, were more than passive backdrops decorating the homes of the wealthy; rather, these functioned as active symbols of the *patronus*' power, status, and identity. In combination with the architectural layout of villas, mosaics, as physical objects embedded in the very layout of the building, helped negotiate and structure relationships between social groups through the control of space and movement within the building. At the Durotrigan villa of Frampton, for example, the *patronus* was approached down a long corridor which led first to a small 'holding-room'; then to the main reception space where the master sat enthroned on a dais.[103] The momentousness of the occasion having been accentuated through the long approach and 'holding-room', the physical and social distance between master and suppliant was further emphasised by the presence of a mosaic separating the pair.[104] Whether this evidence indicates that *civitas* identities had become the preserve of an exclusive elite, as suggested by Sidonius in Gaul, remains uncertain – if this was the case, then the collapse of villa life in the later fourth and early fifth centuries might have signalled the disintegration of *civitas* identities.

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[101] R. Stupperich, 'A Reconsideration of Some Fourth-Century British Mosaics', *Britannia* 11 (1980), 289-301; Scott, 'Society of the Late Roman Villa', pp. 47-8, 51-2.

[102] See Ch. 4.

[103] S. M. Pearce, 'The Hinton St Mary Mosaic Pavement: Christ or Emperor?', *Britannia* 39 (2008), 193-218, at 212.

[104] Pearce, 'Hinton St Mary', 212.

A comprehensive analysis of villa decline in late Roman Britain is not possible here, although the following should be seen as representative. At the Dobunnic villa of Turkdean, for instance, rubbish began to accumulate towards the end of the fourth century, suggesting that the residents no longer commanded the necessary authority or wealth to compel others to tidy the courtyard areas. The presence of only three coins of the House of Theodosius (388-402), compared with eighteen of the House of Valentinian (364-378) is, moreover, indicative of economic downturn.[105] However, some high-status materials, such as three copper-alloy armlet fragments, one dating to the last quarter of the fourth century, were recovered from the site.[106] At Chedworth, another Dobunnic villa, a similar picture is revealed. Here, a third of the 360 coins recovered were issues of House of Valentinian, with only one from the House of Theodosius. Further to the west, the Silurian villa of Llantwit Major – connected to the provincial centre at Cirencester – witnessed its period of greatest prosperity between 340 and 370. However, two coins of the period 337-350 from the Basilican building suggest this structure was abandoned sometime in the latter half of the fourth century.[107] Residential and other spaces were also utilised for purposes other than that which they were originally designed: both the furnace room of the baths complex and the workshops adjacent to the main reception rooms were given over to metalworking, as suggested by the recovery of a knobbed crucible-lid similar to those found at Dinas Powys.[108] Given that civilian *romanitas* seems to have been integral to the performance of Dobunnic and Durotrigan *civitas* identities – and perhaps amongst the Silures, also – the collapse of villa society can perhaps be seen as seriously detrimental to *civitas* identities in the 'urbanised' regions of *Britannia Prima* and central southern Britain more widely. However, the alternative use of villa rooms might

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[105] Holbrook, 'Turkdean', 58, 60.

[106] Holbrook, 'Turkdean', 58, 60.

[107] Hogg and Smith 'Llantwit Major', 239.

[108] Hogg and Smith 'Llantwit Major', 239.

demonstrate that the civilian elite were attempting to reinvent their power, with the production and dissemination of metalwork to clients and retainers a strategy designed for the proprietors to retain their status, a matter returned to in the following chapter.

Towns

As political units modelled upon Roman ideas concerned with the centrality of the town to civic life, Romano-British *civitates* were focused on urban centres, the so-called *civitas*-capitals: *Corinium Dobunnorum* (Cirencester), *Viroconium Cornoviorum* (Wroxeter), *Durnovaria Durotrigum* (Dorchester), *Isca Dumnoniorum* (Exeter), *Venta Silurum* (Caerwent) and *Moridunum Demetarum* (Carmarthen). *Civitas*-capitals were fundamental to cantonal, provincial and diocesan administration, particularly in their role as centres for the collection and re-distribution of taxation in coin and kind, which also made them integral to the trade, productive and social functions of the canton. Urban centres were thus the hub of political and social networks through which potentates could participate in matters of local and regional importance; however, by the late Roman period the *civitas*-capitals had been in certain respects supplanted in their trade and economic functions by the emergence of smaller towns such as Kenchester and Meole Brace, which were situated at more convenient, dispersed locations throughout the landscape.[109]

It might be useful here to turn to the situation in Roman and late antique Gaul in order to provide evidence from which to contrast and compare the function and status of British towns as centres of identity. As the anonymous panegyric celebrating Constantine I's links with Autun suggests, an imperial context was often vital for the literary articulation of civic

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[109] Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, pp. 143-56; M. Todd, 'The Small Towns of Roman Britain', *Britannia* 1 (1970), 114-30, at 124-9; B. C. Burnham and J. Wacher, *The 'Small' Towns of Roman Britain* (London, 1990), pp. 43-50.

pride.[110] In the Roman and late antique periods, moreover, Gaulish towns functioned as units of social and political adherence and fiscal administration. Under the empire, civil authority was the prerogative of a senate or council, comprised of the local landholding elite; whilst in the post-Roman period, power was wielded by counts and bishops, under the nominal suzerainty of the Merovingian kings.[111] Local elites played a significant role in embodying the identity and status of late antique Gaulish towns. A pronounced feature of fourth- and fifth-century Gallic public oration was the announcement of loyalty to, praise of and identification with a particular *urbs* or *civitas* (sometimes in addition to Rome), evident, for instance, in Ausonius' praise of Bordeaux[112] and Sidonius Apollinaris' love of Clermont-Ferrand. In the sixth century, ecclesiastics identified themselves and others through attachment to a particular ecclesiastical centre or bishopric. On a secular level, individuals were often identified on the basis of their civic identity. For instance, one Lupus was described as *Turonicae urbis civis*.[113] In secular and ecclesiastical spheres, and whether as part of the *imperium Romanum*, *imperium Galliarum*, or *regnum Francorum*, late antique Gaulish towns and their inhabitants bore a strong sense of communal identity, expressed through an ideology of civic loyalty.

Epigraphic evidence from Roman Britain suggests that civic identity could also be expressed through citizenship. For instance, a funerary monument commemorating one Volusia Faustina, possibly to be dated to the second or third century, remembers the deceased as a 'citizen of Lincoln'.[114] From a literary perspective, however, this sentiment has gone entirely unrecorded in Roman Britain. Non-survival of literary material may account for such

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[110] *Pan Lat. V.*

[111] C. Lewis, 'Gallic identity and the Gallic *civitas* from Caesar to Gregory of Tours', in S. Mitchell and G. Greatrex (eds.), *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity* (London, 2000), pp. 69-82.

[112] Ausonius, *Mosella*, 19; *Ordo Urbium Nobilium*, 20.

[113] Gregory of Tours, *DLH*, 6.13; Lewis, 'Gallic identity', p. 69.

[114] *RIB*, 250: *Volusia Faustina c(uiis) Lind(ensis).*

an absence; however, the likelihood of a poet or member of the curial class waxing lyrical on the delights of *Viroconium* or *Lindinis* is less certain. Had such poetry been composed during the reigns of Constantius, Constantine I, Magnus Maximus or Constantine III, contemporaries might have heard praise of the size and splendour of Cirencester or the magnificence of York's defences, rebuilt in imperial grandeur by Constantine. The anonymous Panegyric of Constantius indeed reported that Autun was restored by skilled British artisans following the recovery of the island.[115]

From an ecclesiastical viewpoint, the situation in late Roman and early medieval Britain appears also to differ markedly from the Gallic situation. Bishops from London, York and (probably) Lincoln attended the Council of Arles in 314; an *episcopus*, perhaps connected with Chester, is known from an inscription on a lead pan from Shavington, near Nantwich (Cheshire).[116] Whether or not these bishops or others once composed poems praising the ecclesiastical status of these towns remains unknown. What is clear is that amongst the Britons there was no comparable sense of urban ecclesiastical identity as existed in contemporary Gaul; although bishops were undoubtedly important men, attested in the writings of Patrick and Gildas, none are associated with specific urban sites. In fact, there appears to have been a plurality of bishops, whether termed *episcopi* or *sacerdotes* in the post-Roman British kingdoms, particularly in areas without a strong tradition of urbanism.[117]

Conclusion

Within the *civitates*, there existed methods through which regional identities might be articulated, particularly in an elite context which are most visible to us in the archaeological

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[115] *Incerti Panegyricus Constantio Caesari*, 21.21-5.

[116] S. Penney and D. Shotter, 'An inscribed Roman salt pan from Shavington, Cheshire', *Britannia* 27 (1996), 360-5.

[117] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 588.

record. Returning to the epigraphic record, we might explain the Britons' disinclination in numerous ways. In terms of funerary epigraphy, what probably accounts for the Britons' disinterest is the perceived lack of social value attached to commemorating the dead in such an ostentatious fashion; monumentality being regarded as an unnecessary and expensive extravagance amongst the Brittonic peoples, whatever their status. Certainly within their respective *civitates*, there would have been no requirement for an individual to be remembered through their *origo*. The decision not to commemorate through epigraphy should, then, be considered a conscious choice to disregard an expensive 'habit' when other forms of social behaviour, such as gift-giving and feasting, existed to formulate relations and create and sustain status within local society.

As for social competitiveness, the Cornovian and Silurian inscriptions from Wroxeter and Caerwent, respectively, indicate that, by and large, it was the community rather than private individuals who drew prestige from the construction of ostentatious imperial architecture. In terms of personal identity, it is clear that expressing, in death, affiliation with one's *civitas* through a statement of regional citizenship was significant. When living, it might be presumed that individuals also expressed this affiliation in the appropriate context. It would seem that *civitas* identities were conceptualised as peoples rather than territorial units; and while self-identification was important for these communities, the Roman provincial 'system' worked to perpetuate and renew these identities within an imperial context. What is less clear is whether this conceptualisation was a self-visualisation by the groups concerned or the result of the Roman world view which saw barbarians as peoples, either hostile/barbaric (*gentes*) or pacified/civilised (*civitates*). Some ambiguity between people and territory is, indeed, suggested by the Ilkley monument which refers to the

deceased as a citizen of *Cornouia* rather than the Cornovii.[118] As discussed in the following

chapter, the late antique and early medieval periods witnesses the territorialisation of regional

identities and this monument might perhaps mark the early stages of that development.

<u>Post-Roman Inscriptions</u>

To discern how regional *civitas* identities survived and were transformed in the altered

circumstances of the post-Roman period, we must next examine the epigraphic record of the

fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. As discussed above, Handley has suggested that fifth- and

sixth-century epigraphy represents continuity from the fourth century. However, the line that

connects the fourth and fifth centuries is slender indeed, and while writing and Christianity

no doubt persisted in western Britain, the epigraphic habit might still have been a

reintroduction initiated through contact with Gaul and the Mediterranean. While, then,

western Britain became enmeshed within developments affecting the late antique 'Roman'

world, a seismic shift occurred in the distribution of inscribed funerary monuments. Aside

from an outlying Latin inscribed stone from Wroxeter,[119] the Roman-period urban and

military epigraphic centres such as Chester, Caerleon and Cirencester were now marginal to

this practice.

In the post-Roman period, the epigraphic habit was transferred to the communities on

the peripheries of the former diocese. Henceforth, groups began through Christianised

romanitas to perpetuate old and create new ethnic, regional and dynastic identities, of which

'Irishness' appears to have been of particular importance amongst inscribers. Similar

developments took place in the North, where epigraphy was also used as a strategy of elite

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[118] *RIB*, 639.

[119] Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, I, S2, pp. 538-9; *RIB*, 3145.

distinction amongst British groups.[120] Here, the distribution of inscribed stones reflects a new pattern, albeit to a lesser degree than in Wales and the southwest. Previously the Wall and other Roman forts had been the centres for epigraphy, and although the Brigomaglos stone from Vindolanda somewhat continues this tradition, inscribed stones are now found largely within the intramural zone. Our enquiry, then, is focussed on two related questions: first, how were these inscriptions used, if at all, to perpetuate Roman period identities into the early middle ages; and second, how were these stones used to establish the status and identities of new elites in this period? It will be convenient to deal with Wales and the southwest together and the north independently, before bringing our findings together.

The West

In total, around 150 and fifty inscribed stones have been identified in Wales and the English border. Distribution is not even, however. In the southwest, Pembrokeshire (35) and Carmarthenshire (23) dominate Cardiganshire (7).[121] South-eastern Wales, Glamorgan dominates (49), followed by Breconshire (36). Monmouthshire, Radnorshire and Herefordshire together have five stones; while Shropshire just one.[122] In the north, inscriptions are found in greatest numbers in the westernmost regions of Wales: Anglesey (13), Caernarfonshire (17) and Merioneth (14), while Denbighshire (4), Flintshire (1), and Montgomeryshire (1) are noticeably fewer.[123]

Two elements are seen as of primary importance: the inscriptional formulae and the language or languages of the inscription. The inscriptional formulae can be divided into two broad groups; the first, HIC IACIT, 'here lies' X, is found very largely in the north of our

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[120] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', 1-10.

[121] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, fig. 4.1., p. 31.

[122] Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, I, fig. 35, p. 39.

[123] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, fig. 4.1., p. 42.

region.[124] This Christian formula has continental origins, perhaps to be associated with Trier or southwest Gaul.[125] As we shall see, the peoples of north-west Wales had strong continental and Mediterranean links. The second formula, FILIVS + patronymic, or 'X son of Y', predominates in southern Wales. It appears to be derived from the Irish formula X *maqi* Y.[126] Division by language follows a similar pattern. The majority of inscriptions in western Britain are in the Latin language, written in roman letters. However, in south-west Wales, five inscriptions are in the Irish language, wrriten in the ogam alphabet; a further seventeen of ogam and roman-letter.[127] To the east in Brycheiniog and Glamorgan there are three ogam only inscriptions and four ogam and roman-letter monuments and twenty-eight Latin inscriptions.[128] In north-west Wales, by contrast, Latin represents virtually the sole language of commemoration, with only three with both roman-letter and ogam inscriptions.[129] Southwest Britain has seventy-nine inscriptions, mostly located in Cornwall (58) and Devon (20), with an outlier in Somerset (1).[130] Latin inscriptions predominate, with both *hic iacit* and *filius* formulae present; only six inscriptions are in ogam.[131] An outlying ogam stone has been identified at Silchester (Hants.), from a well in the Roman town.

As we have seen, the *civitates* of the Cornovii, Dobunni, Silures, and Dumnonii used inscription to express regional identity. This took place normally when an individual/group was outside the *civitas* or as an expression of group solidarity within an urban context. However, it is possible that the late antique inscriptions introduce further western British

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[124] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, p. 49.

[125] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, pp. 122-3.

[126] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, p. 41; Bu'lock, 'Early Christian Memorial Formulae', 136-7.

[127] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, p. 35.

[128] Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, I, p. 60.

[129] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, p. 48.

[130] E. Okasha, *Corpus of Early Christian Inscribed Stones of South-West Britain* (Leicester, 1993), p. 3.

[131] Okasha, *Corpus*, pp. 1, 14-15.

civitas groups into the epigraphic record, ones who had not, seemingly at least, previously developed an epigraphic consciousness. The first inscription of note, dated to the late fifth or early sixth century, commemorates in roman and ogam letters one:

HOGTIVIS FILI / DEMETI,

'Hogtivis the son of Demetus'.

OGTEN[*AS*]

'Ogtenas'.[132]

This stone displays the characteristic formula of southern Wales, 'X son of Y', given in both roman letters and ogam, demonstrating a dual audience; indeed, Hogtivis or Hogtinis might be a Latinization of the Irish personal name Ogtinas.[133] The purpose of the 'filius' stones, whether in roman-letters or ogam, appears to be as a validation and legitimisation of a group or individuals' ancestry and territorial claims. Located at St Dogwell's, Little Trefgarn (Pembrokeshire), the inscription is of great interest for the possible link between 'Demetus' and the name 'Demetia'. Pembrokeshire appears to have been within the *civitas Demetarum* during the Roman period. And, indeed, we have Gildas's testimony to confirm that Dimetian identity was a potent socio-political force in the sixth century.[134] It is possible that use of the name 'Demetus' was an intentional invocation of 'Demetia', articulating a claim on behalf of Hogtivis, or rather his commemorators, as the legitimate heirs of the ancestral identity. Given both personal names and the use of ogam script demonstrate strong Irish influence, this might have been a useful strategy to secure legitimisation within the local context. However, it is

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[132] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, P119; *ECMW*, no. 390; Thomas, *Mute Stones*, p. 76; P. Sims-Williams, 'The Five Languages of Wales in the Pre-Norman Inscriptions', *CMCS* 44 (Winter, 2002), 1-36, at 26.

[133] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, p. 473.

[134] Gildas, *DEB*, 31.1.

pertinent to note that the relationship with Demetus is only stated in the Latin inscription. What we might see here, then, is the eliding of ancestral Demetian identity with the Irish present, possibly through intermarriage, which asserted the new cultural ascendancy in south-western Wales. Even though Demetus was used only as a personal name rather than a territorial epithet, it is possible that this was an attempt to colonise the local identity in a subtle way by immigrants who could not actually claim to be, as yet, of Demetia.

Another example of the possible use of a *civitas* name as a personal name is observed on a roman and ogam letter inscribed stone from Buckland Monachorum, Devon:

DOBVNNII FABRI FILII ENABARRI

'[the stone of] Dobunnus the Smith son of Enabarrus'.[135]

As with the Little Trefgarn stone, this monument bears inscriptions in both ogam and roman letters. 'Dobunnus' implies a connection with the Dobunnic people, again suggesting that Roman-period identities held potency into the fifth and sixth centuries; however, other interpretations of this name are possible.[136] No textual evidence testifies to the existence of the Dobunni in the later Roman period; it is therefore difficult to substantiate whether or not this identity retained potency in the later fifth and sixth centuries. The possible survival of this name is made all the more fascinating by the socio-political circumstances which prevailed in the eastern areas of *Britannia Prima* in the late Roman period.[137]

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[135] Okasha, *Corpus*, no. 60 (the ogam text is now illegible); R. A. S. Macalister (ed.), *Corpus inscriptionun insularum celticarum*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1945), no. 488.

[136] Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, pp. 339-40.

[137] See Ch. 6.

A more certain demonstration of the transference of regional identities across the late antique period is that from Penbryn, Ceredigion, which served as a memorial of one Corbalengus:[138]

CORBALENGI IACIT / ORDOVS

'Corbalengus lies (here), an Ordovician'.

Apparently, Corbalengus bears a name of Irish derivation, a matter returned to below. Corbalengus was described as an Ordovician – that is, a member of the Iron Age and Roman period inhabitants of northwest Wales.[139] The location of this stone and the emphasis on Corbalengus' origins has led Sims-Williams to conclude that the deceased was commemorated outside his *patria*.[140] Indeed, this would fit the pattern of inscribed funerary monuments from the Roman period where an individual was buried outside their *civitas*; Corbalengus might simply be seen as a traveller who perished on the road and buried by his companions. However, in the circumstances of the period, where competition between regional groups for land and resources was likely to have been fierce, this monument perhaps reflects more than the burial of an individual beyond their homeland.

Whilst it has been suggested that Corbalengus' presence far from his *patria* may have been the result of external or internal pressure on or within northern Wales,[141] the presence of this monument might be more readily explained as an early manifestation of the claims documented in later centuries where the rulers of the northwest, that is, Gwynedd, attempted to assert hegemony over areas of mid-Wales, including Ceredigion and Merioneth. Unfortunately, the stone is no longer in situ in its former position atop a cairn; if the stone

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[138] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, CD 28, pp. 184-8; *ECMW*, no. 126.

[139] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 21.

[140] Sims-Williams, 'Five Languages', 26-7.

[141] Sims-Williams, 'Five Languages', 27.

had originally faced south, it might have served as a marker delineating Ordovician territorial claims to those approaching the north. It should be noted that the choice made by Corbalengus' commemorators to locate his monument atop an existing feature of the ancestral landscape. The cairn is known to have contained a small, black-burnished ware cooking pot dated to *c*. AD 120-160 and an *aureus* of Titus (*c*. AD 74), indicating that it was used in the earlier Roman period, though the cairn itself may date to the Bronze Age. There seems to have been a conscious attempt to link Corbanlengus with the ancestral past,[142] thereby increasing the likelihood that announcement of his Ordovician origins was, in some sense, a statement of hegemonic intentions.

There appears, then, to be a contrast in the manner in which Roman and post-Roman peoples used statements of *origo*; whilst both signalled the burial of persons of foreign extraction, the Roman period use, at least amongst Romano-British peoples, simply testified to their presence outside their *patria*. In contrast, use of the Ordovician name, at least in this context, implies an element of competition and the aggressive use of group and territorial markers within a contested landscape; indeed, this is precisely the sort of conflict we might expect to occur in the aftermath of a 'collapsed state'.[143]

Ordovician identity was not to survive far into the early middle ages. Another stone now in the church at Penmachno but originally from Ffestiniog parish in Merioneth contains the earliest surviving mention of Gwynedd, the kingdom based in Anglesey and Arfon:

CANTIORI HIC IACIT / VENEDOTIS CIVE FVIT /

[C]ONSOBRINO // MA[G]LI / MAGISTRATI[144]

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[142] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, p. 187.

[143] Laycock, *Failed State*, pp. 138-68; Esmonde Cleary, 'Southern Britain', pp. 49-52.

[144] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, MR8, pp. 385-6.

'Cantiorix lies here. He was a citizen of Gwynedd, a kinsman of Maglus the magistrate.'

This stone offers numerous possibilities for comprehending concepts of identity amongst the peoples of late antique western Britain; indeed, it demonstrates quite clearly the syncretic nature of identity and the fusion of several powerful cultural elements: Roman, local, Irish and dynastic. First, as this stone was situated originally amongst a complex of prehistoric monuments known as the 'Graves of the Men of Ardudwy' in Meirionnydd, links with a real or imagined past were important to the commemorators; second, terms such as *cives* and *magistratus*, and indeed the very form of the monument itself, indicate that imperial concepts of power remained potent symbols of authority in north-western Wales;[145] third, the introduction of a name of Irish derivation, *Venedos*, indicates that post-Roman identities could include elements drawn from non-Roman sources without 'contaminating' the potency of the Roman elements; fourth, the deceased's identity, and in contrast to numerous other inscribed stones and the prevailing tendencies of the textual record to assert patrilinear descent, was communicated by his kinship to the (presumably) leading authoratative figure in Gwynedd, Maglus, rather than Cantiorix's own father.

Numerous elements were, then, deployed in commemorating Cantiorix. But what are we to make of the statement of Cantiorix's Gwynedd *origo*? Following the interpretation of the Corbalengus stone, it should be clear that Cantiorix's place of burial in Meirionnydd occurred beyond his *patria*. As his commemorators make clear, Cantiorix was a person of substance and his remembrance demanded monumentality, particularly as he died beyond the confines of early *Venedos*. Was this in some sense a hegemonic statement by the commemorators?

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[145] N. Edwards, 'Roman continuity and reinvention: the early medieval inscribed stones of north Wales', in W. J. Britnell and R. J. Silvester (eds.), *Reflections on the Past: Essays in Honour of Frances Lynch* (Welshpool, 2012), pp. 390-405, at pp. 391-8.

Certainly not all those commemorated beyond their *patria* were treated so for aggressive reasons. For instance, the burial of one *Aliortvs Elmetiaco*, 'Aliortus from Elmet',[146] at Llanaelhaearn (Caernarfonshire) in the shadow of Tre'r Ceiri hillfort stands testimony to the burial of a person outside their *patria* which seems to preclude any territorial claims. The Llanaelhaearn stone may simply be a monument recording the origins of the deceased, paralleling the Roman period inscriptions noting the Dobunnic and Cornovian origins of the women buried in the northern frontier zone. Alternatively, Aliortus may have been an Elmetian exile driven from his homeland either by an internal squabble or through the threat of the neighbouring Deiri or the Bernicii. Either way, The kingdom of Elmet was in north Britain, far from Llanaelhaearn.[147] That is, while it would have been impossible for Aliortus' body to be taken back to Elmet, the same considerations surely did not apply to Cantiorix, who was buried in a territory neighbouring his own, unless he was also an exile. If not, it would surely have been possible to transport Cantiorix's body home, unless of course the commemorators were intent on making a demonstration of their power over the region in which Cantiorix was buried. Indeed, perhaps this monument again functioned as an aggressive symbol of dominance planted by a hegemonic power in territory to which they laid claim. The elaborate nature of the inscription and reference to the ruling powers of Gwynedd indicates that this was a political message beyond mere sentimentality. In fact, the Cantiorix monument shares important features with the Corbalengus stone: while the former does not contain an extended description of Corbalengus' status, both were constructed on or within an ancestral landscape of cairns and other prehistoric monuments.

The Cantiorix inscription therefore demonstrates that it was the power of the locality that held the most significance: citizenship of a defined region, kinship to its rulers, praise of

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[146] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, CN20, pp. 275-7.

[147] See. Ch. 7.

a territorial name, and the planting of this stone in a landscape of ancestral power all indicate that regionalism was the dominant force in post-Roman Britain. Although in western Britain the late antique tradition of raising inscribed stones appears to have been connected with the presence of Irish communities, it was more across the western Europe and the Mediterranean a practice associated with peoples connected with or formerly belonging to the Roman empire.[148] When viewed in this wider context, the phrase *hic iacit* and the term *civis* may perhaps have been reintroductions of the fifth and sixth centuries derived from contact with Gaul and the Mediterranean. However, though ostensibly 'Roman' in origin, terms such as *civis* and *magistratus* may have part of the local lexicon for generations. As argued throughout this thesis, and illustrated above, Romano-Britons regarded 'national' and regional citizenship as integral to their identity, and therefore elements which appear 'Roman' might well have been regarded by contemporaries as local or British concepts rather than necessarily terms drawn, directly at least, from the empire. But given the earlier tradition amongst Roman auxiliaries, it is to be wondered whether citizenship here was a statement of an exalted military status rather than a general sense of belonging to a territorial unit or people.

Another stone from Llantrisant, Anglesey, dated to the second half of the sixth century, preserves the terminology of citizenship.[149] Here, the memorial, which commemorates the unnamed wife of one Bivatisus the priest and bears the longest inscription known from western and northern Britain, contains the phrase *omnivm civivm,* 'of all citizens'. This, rather than a declaration of secular citizenship, may be a phrase denoting a widely-held ecclesiastical concept of citizenship.[150] Citizenship was now also a Christian

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[148] Handley, *Death, Society and Culture*, pp. 35-64.

[149] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, AN46, pp. 210-17.

[150] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, pp. 210, 214.

concept. It is evident, therefore, in both secular and ecclesiastical society in north-west Wales, citizenship was an integral part of high-status identity within local political society.

An inscription from Penmachno nevertheless suggests that contact with the empire was of the utmost importance for the emergent elite of north-western Wales, in particular, signalling the extent of their political contacts with the wider world.[151] Dated to the period 567 x 579 by Charles-Edwards[152] and to after 540 by Jeremy Knight,[153] the inscription refers, respectively, either to the Emperor Justin II who resolved the Three Chapters dispute or to the consul Justin of 540. Whether we read this inscription as Knight's IN TE(m)PO[RE] / IVSTI[NI P(ost) / CON(sulatum) [XXV] or Charles-Edwards' IN TEMPORE IUSTI[NI] CON the end result is that an individual within the kingdom of Venedotia in the mid- to late sixth century was likely to have been commemorated by reference to the reign of either an eastern Roman emperor or an individual who held the consulship. This has signified to Charles-Edwards that:

> For the Britons it would have been of greater consequence, for to date one's public
> monuments by the consulships of an emperor in Constantinople was as eloquent
> way as could be found of affirming one belonged to the far-flung and loose-knit
> community of citizens of which he was head.[154]

To a certain extent this must be true. But herein lies the problem: should we regard this monument as 'British' or local? That is, does this represent an ideological statement which most Britons identified with or was it simply testifying to the aspirations of an individual, his immediate family, or perhaps those of a dynastic or territorial unit? It might be said that

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[151] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, CN37, p. 301.

[152] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 237-8.

[153] J. K. Knight, 'Penmachno Revisited: The Consular Inscription and its Context', *CMCS* 29 (Summer 1995), 1-10.

[154] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 238.

Charles-Edwards' view of this inscription has been influenced by his interpretation of Gildas's use of *civis* which, as was argued in a previous chapter, refers not to some pan-British inclusion within the wider Roman citizen body but a differentiation from all other *gentes*.[155] As suggested above, *cives* can be seen to be a part of Brittonic regional and national political and ecclesiastical discourse already utilised by those who held or aspired to social power. While, then, communities along in Ireland and along Britain's western shoreline, from Cornwall to the Clyde, were interacting in various ways with communities in the Mediterranean, which of course included the eastern Roman empire, there is little to suggest this amounts to a 'national policy'.

In contrast with, for example, the Franks and Ostrogoths, the Britons were not represented by a dominant *rex* such as Clovis or Theoderic who spoke, ostensibly at least, for the entire British *gens*. It is possible, however, that the Britons saw themselves collectively as a single language group or a religious *familia* connected through divine providence. Nonetheless, a multiplicity of kingdoms existed within western and northern Britain and this stone might be a monument to that individual polity's estimation of themselves, a statement of localised power which demonstrated and magnified the contacts of the regional elite over and above that of some notional form of Brittonic adherence to Rome. Nevertheless, it is revealing that within peripheral northwest Wales, a kingship group could regard themselves as connected intimately to the Roman state. Perhaps therefore we should view this monument as it appeared to contemporaries – that is, as a statement of early Venedotian power, not as a symbolic statement of British inclusion within the Roman empire.

That the early rulers of *Venedotia*, Gwynedd, ascribed themselves a higher position than their rival kingdoms, British and Anglo-Saxon, is suggested by the inscribed stone now

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[155] See Ch. 4.

in the church at Llangadwaladr.[156] Here a monument to king Cadfan of Gwynedd (d. 625) was raised, probably by his son and successor Cadwallon, which refers to the Cadfan as *sapientisimus opinatisimus omnium regum*, 'wisest and most renowned of kings', with *sapientisimus* interpreted as marking a move towards kingship dominated by a strong ecclesiastical culture. More pertinently, the use of the superlatives mirrors those found on monuments to the emperor Phocas in Rome dated to 608, the Ostrogothic king, Theoderic (d. 526), the Visigothic ruler Chindasunith at Merida (641-52) and Gundbadus, king of the Burgundians, all of whom aspired to 'Roman' forms of rulership. Thus the Catamanus stone stands as a testament to Cadfan's status within north-west Wales and perhaps beyond, but also to the aspirations of his son, Cadwallon, to wield *imperium* in north-west Wales and, indeed, throughout the island in opposition to the Northumbrian king, Edwin.[157]

Regional and local power, exhibited through the control of land and the creation of boundaries, seems to have been the most significant impulse in the raising of inscribed funerary monuments. Creation of and reference to group identities was a particularly important aspect of this process. Thus regional identities could be renewed or created in an epigraphic context. Further evidence for the importance of locality comes in the forms of the inscriptions, many of which assert the patrilinear descent of the deceased such as that from Llansanffraid commemorating one 'Nammius son of Victorinus'[158] and that from Ystradfellte raised in remembrance of 'Dervacus the son of Iustus'.[159] As noted above, this form of commemoration was especially common in south-west Wales suggesting that assertions of patrilinear descent represent claims by an emergent elite to be considered generational.

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[156] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, AN26, pp. 180-3; *ECMW*, no. 13.

[157] T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Cadwallon ap Cadfan', *Oxford DNB*, Oxford, online edn. (www.oxforddnb.com.unicat.bangor.ac.uk/view/article/4322, accessed 28 Sept. 2014); Edwards, *Corpus*, III, p. 182; *idem*, 'Roman continuity and reinvention', p. 390.

[158] Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, I, B35, p. 220.

[159] Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, I, B50, p. 252.

While of course the inscriptions themselves were important, their location within the landscape can be seen as significant also. As we have seen, the inscriptions in remembrance of Corbalengus and Cantiorix were on stones set either on a burial mound or within a complex of prehistoric monuments. Prehistoric sites were often utilised as Christian cemeteries and inscribed stones are thought to mark these sites, whether or not they developed into a *llan*.[160] This use of the ancestral past is evident at, for example, Vaynor,[161] Llanfihangel Ysgeifiog,[162] and Caerwys.[163] The Caerwys stone again reminds us of the importance of the Roman past to the siting of inscribed stones. Similar concerns with the past are evident in the southwest, in Dumnonia. For instance, Class I inscribed stones at Boslow, St Just and Carnsew stood upon mounds of possible prehistoric origin or Romano-British cemeteries.[164] Thus the monument's placement and its inscription served a dual purpose, both of which emphasised the legitimacy of the deceased, and thereby their descendants, to claim authority of people and territory. But here we must emphasise the role of the audience in accepting such claims, for a monument is powerless in itself without the tacit endorsement of those who view it, under coercion or otherwise, that the claims forwarded by the monument's message were legitimate.

Nancy Edwards has made a strong case for the monuments on or near Roman roads and former Roman sites, such as Caer Gai on Lake Bala, to be assertions of territorial rights by kin-groups who derived power from the ancestral Roman past.[165] Whether or not the site had seen recent late Roman occupation appears to have been irrelevant. An inscribed stone, for instance, was raised in the vicinity of the fort at Tomen-y-mur, despite its abandonment

[160] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, p. 45.

[161] Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, I, B46-7, pp. 245-8.

[162] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, AN20, p. 173.

[163] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, F1, p. 349.

[164] Dark, *Britain and the Roman Empire*, p. 158.

[165] Edwards, 'Roman continuity and reinvention', pp. 391-5.

since around 140.[166] As with the stones set in relation to prehistoric monuments, former Roman forts appear to have been viewed as part of the ancestral landscape. This might be relevant for the interpretation of the inscribed stone raised to the Irish-named individual at Wroxeter.[167]

CVNORI*X*

MACUSMA

[*Q*]VICO[*L*]I[*N*]E

'Cunorix macus MaquiColine.'

'*Cunorix* (Conri), son of *Maqqos-Coline* (Macc-Cuilinn).'

Although it has been argued that Wroxeter was a high-status site in use in the fifth and sixth centuries, there is no suggestion that sites such as Tomen-y-Mur were reused as residences for a 'king' and his war-band. However, Roman sites, whether forts or towns, may have held symbolic importance and, possibly, were used as inauguration sites or in some other ceremonial function.

What, then, of 'Irish' identities in late antique Britain: does the presence of Irish names on inscribed monuments, the use of ogam and certain epigraphic formulae demonstrate the influx of people from across the Irish Sea? The sheer number of monuments which record persons with Irish names would seem to indicate the presence of immigrants from Ireland who arrived following the breakdown in Roman authority in the fifth and sixth centuries. In fact, Irish federates may have been settled in south Wales in the reign of Magnus

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[166] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, MR21, p. 412. Two other stones, MR22-3, were located in close proximity to the Roman road south of Tomen-y-mur.

[167] Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, I, S2, pp. 538-9.

Maximus (382-388).[168] Barbarian Irish settlement, evident in the proliferation of inscribed funerary monuments, may then have occurred in late antique western Britain between 400 and 500. In fact, western Britain might be regarded as a porous frontier similar to the Rhine-Danube where barbarians were settled and integrated in the course of the later fourth and fifth centuries. Irish identity might, then, have been synonymous with warrior-status. The monument at Castell Dwyran to one Voteporix, thought possibly to be a kinsman to Gildas's Vortiporus, was commemorated in a dual ogam and roman-letter inscription, the latter describing him as *protictor*, a title borne by other royal kindreds in the early medieval west.[169] We cannot know what lay behind such a title, and an evocation of the Roman past was certainly a motivation; it may have been granted to a forebear by a 'British' emperor such as Maximus or Constantine III.

Irish names and ogam script certainly abound on fifth- and sixth-century inscribed monuments, suggesting that Irish settlement had, indeed, occurred in areas of coastal Wales, Breconshire and southwest England. Extensive use of the formula 'X son of Y' suggests, indeed, that a large immigrant population was desirous to secure their legitimacy within the local landscape by reference to patrilinear relationships.[170] Political identities were syncretic, however. This pertains to whether one considers Irish influence the result of a large population movement, an elite transfer or a re-negotiating of existing identities by an indigenous people. Indeed, within Pembrokeshire, probably an area of high Irish settlement, according at least to the epigraphic record, there appears to have been an element of

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[168] Morris, *Age of Arthur*, pp. 155-63; Thomas, *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak?* pp. 44-6; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 154-68, at p. 156.

[169] Edwards, *Corpus*, I, CM3; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 174-5.

[170] Bu'lock, 'Early Christian Memorial Formulae', 141.

continuity or recognition of the ancestral past by the dominant 'Irish' dynasty, apparent in Gildas's description of Vortiporus as the 'tyrant of the Demetae'.[171]

Indeed, though settlement probably did occur, there must have been a complex web of interactions which linked areas of western Britain with those across the Irish Sea. In the Roman period, links had been established between the imperial authorities and the *Scotti* and while links between the Catholic Church and Ireland may have in some respects renewed these formal links it is quite likely that any communication between the continent and Ireland, if not predicated sea links, benefited from existing associations between Ireland and Britain. Mediterranean imports of ceramics and glass occur on both sides of the Irish Sea and these might suggest links between kin groups or kingships which were cemented through other associations such as marriage. It is also quite likely that if Irish federates were established in western Britain that these men also on occasion returned home either permanently or temporarily, something which occurred on the Rhine and Danube frontiers. In fact, it would seem possible that the presence of Irish names such as Corbalengus on some inscribed stones reflects a process of emulation rather than the notion that this was a family of Irish descendents transformed into local Ordovicians. Indeed, that Demetus occurs as a personal name might reflect the reluctance of immigrants to claim such ancestry.

The monuments of Corbalengus the Ordovician and Cantiorix the 'citizen of Gwynedd' are also relevant here. Corbalengus bears a name of Irish derivation; his regional identity is Brittonic. Corbalengus has been seen as a descendent of an Irish immigrant family settled and assimilated into Ordovician society.[172] On the other hand, Cantiorix has a name of British derivation but represents an Irish-named polity. Indeed, the emergence of Venedotia, relates to the Féni, one of the three ruling peoples of seventh-century Ireland, who according

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[171] Gildas, *DEB*, 31.1.

[172] Edwards, *Corpus*, II, p. 187.

to Charles-Edwards extended their influence over the eastern coast of Ireland, and hence to Britain, *c*. 500, thereby extinguishing the Ordovician identity.[173] Ethnic replacement seems key to this explanation. But while violence might have been integral to this process, cultural and political influence were also central; Irish settlement may have been limited to a powerful core elite which affected concepts in regional group identity; indeed, this fusion was not predicated upon 'Britishness' or 'Irishness' but the assertion of power in the locality. Any ethnic associations in the names Venedotia or Cantiori were surely secondary to the concepts expressed on the stone which asserted citizenship of a territorial unit, membership of a dynastic group, and the claims of that power to hegemony in the region.

While Irish settlers may have been prominent in post-Roman western Britain we must view the changes in territorial names as part of a wider process of cultural and political change affecting Britain at this time. Transformation of personal and regional names and identities was an on-going process in the fifth and sixth centuries, some of which occurred under the pressure of immigration, hostile or otherwise. However, it is suggested here that the major element in the deceased's personal identity was kinship and regionality rather than ethnicity. Membership of a people or territorial unit and declarations of kinship, whether to a father or other relative, marked the deceased and their commemorators as persons of significance within in local socio-political society at regional and, in some cases, inter-regional level. The early medieval inscribed stones of western Britain, then, offer an insight into the expression and conception of group identities in the fifth and sixth centuries; the essence of these stones and the impulse which led to their inscribing and placement in the landscape was as an assertion of local power mediated through the concepts of continuity with the local, ancestral past, assertions of Irish-ness and the power of *romanitas* articulated through claims of ancestry and kinship and belonging to a territorial unit or people.

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[173] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 178.

Epigraphy was, then, key to the formation of new political identities and 'kingdoms' in the fifth and sixth centuries.

The North

As noted above, the Wall represents an epigraphic hotspot in the Roman period. Various units stationed on the Wall registered their presence on building projects and religious dedications. The epigraphic habit also extended to the Antonine frontier during the occupation of southern Scotland, leaving a mark on the landscape and perhaps the psyche of the intramural peoples.[174] When we enter the post-Roman period, the distribution of inscribed stones shifts from previous epigraphic centres along the Wall and becomes, to a more limited degree, a feature of socio-political expression in the intramural zone. There are considerably fewer inscribed stones in northern Britain than in Wales and the southwest, with thirteen extant stones known from the lands between the Solway and the Firth. There is a cluster of four stones from Kirkmadrine on the Rhinns of Galloway in the far west of the intramural zone, with another two at Whithorn; another cluster in the Upper Tweed valley, though not necessarily associated directly with one another; and individual stones from Vindolanda, just south of the Wall, Brox (Liddesdale) and Kirkliston, near Edinburgh.[175] According to Forsyth, these inscribed stones of northern Britain fall into two groups: ecclesiastical and secular.[176] We begin with the secular inscribed stones.

Unlike the western British stones, there are no direct references to former *civitas* groups or early medieval kingdoms in the northern epigraphic record. That said, the limited number of stones do reflect the general concerns with power and legitimacy displayed on their western counterparts. An important secular inscribed stone is that from Vindolanda, the

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[174] See Ch. 8.

[175] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', nos. 1-13.

[176] Forsyth, '*Hic Memoria Perpetua*', p. 115.

Roman fort just south of the Wall. Known as the 'Brigomaglos stone', the inscription utilises the *hic iacit* formula, common to the Welsh stones, and has been dated to the late fifth or early sixth century.[177] The name 'Brigomaglos' is of a 'Celtic' type, a compound containing the elements *brig*, 'high', and *maglos*, 'chief'.[178] The second element parallels the name 'Maglos' found on the Cantiorix inscribed stone from Penmachno, suggesting that vernacular names retained prominence in certain parts of the Roman diocese throughout the imperial period. The location is also of some importance. As we have seen, a number of western stones were sited at or in close proximity to Roman forts and/or roads. This stone rehearses that strategy; however, Vindolanda appears to have been occupied into the fifth century so perhaps the power being invoked was a far more recent phenomena; indeed, the Wall appears to have retained its prominence into the earliest medieval centuries.[179] As this was a proprietorial stone, it would be interesting if the precise location of the original setting of the Brigomaglos stone was known – that is, perhaps it was intended to be read as a boundary marker by travellers approaching from a particular (hostile?) direction.

Although a later ecclesiastical site, the Latinus stone from Whithorn is thought to have stood as a special grave at a secular power centre.[180] This stone represents one of the more elaborate monuments from southern Scotland, bearing a unique inscription which commemorates Latinus and his unnamed daughter with the phrase *(h)ic sinum fecerunt*, 'they made this sign'. Arguably, the 'extended Latinate' inscription represent a greater level of continuity with the later Roman period – that Whithorn stands across from Maryport of the

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[177] K. H. Jackson, 'Brigomaglos and St. Briog', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 5th ser. 10 (1982), 61-5; Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', no. 7.

[178] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', no. 8: *Brigomaglos hic iacit* [- -]*cus*.

[179] See Ch. 7.

[180] Forsyth, '*Hic Memoria Perpetua*', p. 116; Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', no. 5.

Cumbrian coast, where a cluster of fourth-century inscriptions, one bearing the *chi-rho*.[181] There was, indeed, a high-level of interaction between the frontier and the intramural zone in the later Roman period,[182] and this post-Roman activity probably represents an adaptation of that interaction as Christianity became increasingly important as a marker of cohesive identity between the communities on either side of the former *limes*. The *romanitas* of Latinus' name is evident; however, he was regarded as the *nepos*, 'descendant' of one *Barrouados*, both terms suggestive of Irish influence.[183]

In Tweeddale in the central southern uplands, is the Yarrow stone.[184] This commemorates the two *principes* Nudus and Dumnogenus, the sons of one Liberalis. In its style, the Yarrow stone with its extended dedication and use of superlatives resembles the Cadfan stone from Llangadwaladr. Rather than stressing its value, Charles Thomas has argued that these unknown 'princes' and their father were an unimportant dynasty mocked as very insignificant. But this seems unlikely – that these figures are not known from the Harleian genealogies should not be seen as significant and pertains virtually all those commemorated on early medieval inscribed stones. The monument appears might possibly have been a 'proprietorial' stone, marking off territory claimed or belonging to the deceased's kin-group.

The final two secular proprietorial stones are also worth considering. The first, a sixth-century monument from Brox in Liddesdale, commemorates one Carantius son of Cupitianus.[185] Like the Brigomaglos stone, which lies at a short distance to the south-east, the Carantius stone bears the *hic iacit* formula common to stones from northern Wales. As with a

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[181] Forsyth, '*Hic Memoria Perpetua*', pp. 115-16.

[182] See Ch. 7.

[183] P. Sims-Williams, *Celtic Inscriptions of Britain: Phonology and Chronology* (Oxford, 2003), p. 120.

[184] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', no. 9.

[185] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', no. 8.

number of western stones, and those from Yarrow and Vindolanda, the purpose of this monument was as a declaration of power by a secular, Christian elite.[186] But we should also view these stones as a method by which such power was created and sustained rather than a mere reflection of the contemporary situation. The second stone is the famous 'Catstane', now in the grounds of Edinburgh airport.[187] The monument dates to the fifth century and commemorates one Vetta the son (or possibly, daughter) of Victricius.[188] Unlike the Brox and Yarrow stones, the Cat Stane appears to be situated much more obviously, to the modern observer, within a landscape of power. Nearby, was the Roman fort of Cramond, utilised during the third-century Severan campaigns and possibly at site of interaction between 'Roman' and 'native' into the fourth century.[189] More definite signs of secular political activity are apparent in the place-name Kirkliston, which contains the element *llys*, 'court', which is suggestive of an elite residence where food renders were consumed.[190]

Overall, these stones are suggestive of the emergence of secular elite groups between the Walls who participated in the late antique culture prominent in areas of western Britain. Indeed, it is indicative that these groups were in contact with Brittonic groups further south, sharing a similar cultural outlook and perception of their place in the post-Roman world. Nevertheless, the distributions of the northern inscribed stones are of interest, with no stones, as yet, having been located in what was or became Alclud, and areas to its immediate south in Ayrshire. Nor are any monuments found south of Vindolanda, despite the literary evidence for post-Roman political units in these regions.[191] One notable feature of the northern stones is the absence of named political entities amongst the inscriptions. While this was not exactly

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[186] Forsyth, '*Hic Memoria Perpetua*', p. 119.

[187] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', no. 13.

[188] A. Rutherford and G. Ritchie, 'The Catstane', *PSAS* 105 (1972-74), 183-8, at 185.

[189] See Ch. 7.

[190] Forsyth, '*Hic Memoria Perpetua*', p. 118.

[191] See Ch. 7.

common in the epigraphic habit in western regions, groups or territories were named. The absence of any such units from northern Britain might be a consequence of the small size of the sample, though it might also suggest that territorial kingdoms were slower in emerging, with power vested in individuals who controlled relatively small territories which were not strictly defined. However, it might also have been used as a strategy of distinction amongst kin-groups who controlled smaller blocks of territory in contrast to larger units such as Alclud; of course, this remains speculative but might also apply to parts of Wales.

Turning now to the ecclesiastical stones, we have two important groups, one from Kirkmadrine and another from Peebles. There are also the stones from Whithorn. The Kirkmadrine group from the Rhinns of Galloway are comprised of four stones,[192] commemorating the *sacerdotes* of the Kirkmadrine ecclesiastical community, dated to the sixth century.[193] The men referred to on the extant stones, Viventius, Mauorius, and Florentius are given no patronymics or other kinship markers, indicating that their status derived entirely from their role within the ecclesiastical community. Given the links between secular and ecclesiastical elites, it is unlikely that strict separation was maintained in real terms; this was simply the impression given by the commemorators. Kirkmadrine, on the Rhinns of Galloway, was sited perfectly to communicate with other ecclesiastical and secular power centres in the Irish Sea zone; the emergence of the epigraphic habit in Galloway was a product of this interaction, though perhaps with other areas of Britain and the Isle of Man rather than with Gaul.[194]

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[192] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', nos. 1-4.

[193] Forsyth, '*Hic Memoria Perpetua*', pp. 122-5.

[194] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', 7; Handley, 'The origins', 192.

The second group clusters around Peebles in the Tweed Valley.[195] Two stones come from the town itself, perhaps originally from the Cross Kirk graveyard site.[196] As with the Kirkmadrine group, an inscription uses the term *sacerdos*, can be explained as a reference to 'bishop' or 'priest'. In their use of *sacerdos*, both the Peebles and Kirkmadrine stones are comparable to the inscribed stone from Llantrisant, Anglesey, which commemorates on the longest inscription known from early medieval Britain, the most holy and loving wife of one Bivatisus, *sacerdos et vasso* of Paulinus. Here, parallels can be drawn with continental examples from Spain and Gaul which illustrate that *sacerdos* was someone who held priestly office, though in Bivatisus' case his elaborate monument might suggest he was also a bishop.[197] It would seem, then, that the individual commemorated on the Peebles stone, Neitan the *sacerdos*, held priestly office. Neitan is a name of Brittonic derivation, suggestive of a pre-Anglian ecclesiastical community which was perhaps incorporated into the Northumbrian church in the course of the seventh century. The second, now lost, inscription, referred to an *episcopus*, 'bishop', possibly to be read as NINIAVI.[198] This perhaps clarifies the meaning of *sacerdos* by referring explicitly to the deceased as 'bishop'. In close proximity to the Peebles stones is the monument from Manor valley commemorating one Coninia.[199] The stone, which is dated to the sixth century, may be proprietorial though nothing is known of the deceased's family. It is interesting nonetheless that Coninia is a name of Irish derivation: does this suggest connections with the Irish church, which become of great significance amongst the Northumbrians in the seventh century?

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[195] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', nos. 11-12.

[196] K. A. Steer, 'Two Unrecorded Early Christian Stones', *PSAS* 101 (1968-69), 127-9, at 127-8; Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', no. 4.

[197] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, AN46, pp. 211-15.

[198] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', no. 11

[199] Thomas, 'Inscriptions of Southern Scotland', no. 10.

These few stones mark the presence of established and confident ecclesiastical communities participating in a wider late antique cultural phenomenon which linked them to other communities in western Britain, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Gaul and the Mediterranean. The lack of overt concern with kinship or familial ties implies that, at least in death, these earthly links were of little concern to these ecclesiastical communities who wished to present themselves as the family of God, cut off from the secular world. Of course, reality would have been different with secular and religious communities mutually dependent in terms of power and familial ties. However, we can gain little insight into this world from the surviving epigraphic evidence.

The presence of Christian communities in this region allows us to hypothesise about the changing nature of interactions between the communities here and elsewhere in former Roman Britain; indeed, it is possible that the Christianisation of the intramural zone resulted in the transformation of 'ethnic' identity amongst the communities between the Walls. As we have seen, to Patrick and Gildas, Christianity was an integral part of 'Britishness'. While inscribed stones are not known from the kingdom of Alclud on the River Clyde, Patrick's condemnation of Coroticus' warriors as 'fellow citizens' suggests he regarded the recipients of his letter as fellow Britons.[200] Rather than a natural identity, this can be seen as the transformation of Roman-period Britishness and its expansion beyond the former confines of empire. That is, Britishness, like other early medieval identities, was not static or fixed but an expansive and transformative entity which developed to incorporate groups previously beyond this imagined community.

Increased ecclesiastical contacts probably facilitated the growth of early medieval Britishness, helping this identity expand beyond the former imperial limits. Although contact

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[200] See Ch. 4.

between inscribing regions may have stimulated the creation of British ethnicity, this identity was not predicated on epigraphic consciousness. Where inscribed stones were not raised, 'eccles' place-names indicate the presence of Brittonic-speaking Christian communities. Derived from Latin *ecclesia*, modern English 'eccles' represents early Welsh *egles* or modern Welsh *eglwys*, 'church'. To name a brief selection we have, for instance, Eccles near Coldstream, above the River Tweed in an area which came under Bernician supremacy sometime in the sixth or seventh century. In the central Lakeland area of Cumbria, meanwhile, there is an extensive range of place-names which contain the element 'eccles', a number of which appear in early documentation such as Eclishouse (Millom Parish), Eglisfylde (Conishead) and Eccles Taiths (Sedburgh).[201]

Within the midland counties of Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire appear a number of 'eccles' place-names, such as Eccleshall, six miles west of Stone, the site of a later Mercian priory, and Eccleston, near Chester. Further examples are known from the counties of Herefordshire and Warwickshire at, respectively, Eccleswall and Exhall.[202] Further north and east in Lancashire, Yorkshire, Durham and Derbyshire 'eccles' name abound, such as Eccleshill near Darwen (Lancs.) and Eccleshill in Yorkshire West Riding.[203] There are further examples from Norfolk and Kent, though these are not strictly relevant for our discussion. From the boundaries of modern Wales, up into the intramural zone, 'eccles' place-names thus stand testimony to the presence of communities in which the Latin/Brittonic word for 'church' existed long enough to persist into English, indicating the long term presence of British Christian communities.

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[201] D. W. Elsworth, 'Eccles Place-Names in Cumbria', *TCWAAS* 11 (2011), 234-8, fig. 1, 235.

[202] Ibid.

[203] K. Cameron, 'Eccles in English Place-Names', in M. W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson (eds.), *Christianity in Britain, 300-700* (Leicester, 1969), pp. 87-92, at pp. 87-9.

Further evidence suggests that there was indeed an organised British Church which, no doubt, helped to disseminate the concept of ecclesiastical citizenship throughout the Brittonic regions which did not participate in the epigraphic habit. The strong ecclesiastical nature of British identity was asserted in the discussion of Gildas. Gildas furthermore made clear that although sinful and contemptible, there existed a church hierarchy consisting of *sacerdotis*, *ministri* and *clerici*.[204] It is clear at any rate that in the late sixth century there existed a company of bishops who met with Augustine, who themselves wished to confer with the community of Bangor-Is-Coed and in particular a holy man who offered advice on regards the Briton's and Augustine's actions at the second meeting at which the latter condmned the Britons as heretics and prophesised their destruction at the hands of the English.[205]

Links between the Brittonic regions appear then to have been strong from an ecclesiastical perspective, and thisprobably engendered a sense of identity amongst these communities. Thus while there may have been swathes of territory controlled by Britons which do not appear to have maintained an epigraphic consciousness, which includes the community at Bangor-Is-Coed, they should be considered to have had a less developed sense of identity or ecclesiastical culture. Instead, these groups were perhaps further removed from the main regions of coastal interaction in the Irish Sea zone which promulgated the dissemination of the epigraphic habit in the fifth and sixth centuries.

Conclusion

The discussion above has explored the epigraphic habit in Roman and early medieval western and northern Britain in order to draw contrasts and comparisons between the two, largely

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[204] Gildas, *DEB*, 66.

[205] Bede, *HE*, ii.2.

distinct, data sets which exist from the two periods. What seems abundantly clear from the Roman-period evidence is that in overall terms, regional *civitas* communities – on a group and individual basis – did not participate fully in the epigraphic habit, which was largely the purview of foreigners who arrived with the empire. Nonetheless, on the rare occasions when epigraphy was employed by persons belonging to the Romano-British *civitates*, it becomes evident that citizenship of the said regional entities was amongst the most important elements within an individual's personal identity. That *civitas* identities held a 'corporate' power is, moreover, suggested by the rare instances of building dedications performed by the *civitates* themselves rather than individual members of these groups – collective identity within the *civitas*, so it would seem overlaid personal claims of prestige, at least during the period when epigraphy was an important practice. However, within the Romano-British *civitates*, specific groups such as the villa elite maintained a sense of regional identity through the sharing of distinct cultural identities manifest, for example, in the possession of certain mosaic types. More limited evidence suggests that towns also acted as units of adherence, visible through claims of citizenship and attachment to a particular civic centre.

It should perhaps come as little surprise that when the epigraphic habit again became prominent in parts of the former western empire in the fifth and sixth centuries, western and northern Britain participated in this practice. However, as shown above, a major shift had occurred, particularly in western Britain, with areas previously outside the epigraphic hotspots now becoming the main areas where identities were expressed through the epigraphic habit. Once again, epigraphy had become a method by which status and identity could be established and extolled in a local context; indeed, as both in western and northern Britain the epigraphic habit seems to be associated with Irish settlers, or at the very least persons under the influence of Irish culture, language and political expression, it could be said that the Britons again maintained a limited epigraphic consciousness.

Nonetheless, identities in this period were syncretic, especially in the political sphere, with Irish and British personal names occurring in reference to territorial units with names derived from former *civitates* or Irish political groupings such as the Feni. In establishing claims of supremacy, those commemorating through inscribed stones could envisage and create dynastic groups, through claims of kinship to deceased relatives and leading figures in the locality. This also extended to wider claims of authority derived from association with the Roman empire and the prestige that these links bestowed on individual groups, particularly the emergent kingdom of Venedotia, or Gwynedd. Irish settlers were also a major participants in the epigraphic habit in western Britain, and these groups used this practice to secure their power in the region. Yet however much the terminology of the stones represented claims of Irish supremacy or resonated with the imperial present and past, the language of authority emblazoned upon the inscribed stones was firmly rooted within an insular tradition of power and spoke of the community of citizens of Britain. Indeed, it was the Christianisation and transformation of citizenship and its expansion beyond the former imperial *limes* on the Hadrianic frontier which aided the creation of a new sense of Britishness in the post-Roman world. Whether participating or not in the epigraphic habit, communities from Cornwall to the Clyde were now *cives*, the citizens of Britain, splintered into numerous regional and dynastic groups but distinct from the heathen communities that existed on their northern and eastern boundaries. We turn now to the final two chapters, which discuss in greater detail the emergence of regional and dynastic groupings in western and northern Britain in the late antique period.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the emergence of early medieval kingdoms controlled by *reges* or *tyranni* within former *Britannia Prima*. The argument is separated into two interrelated sections: the first discusses the eastern regions where urban centres and villas were features of the settlement pattern; the second then considers the western regions where hillforts and other non-villa rural settlements remained important parts of the landscape. It will be argued that kingship emerged primarily in the far western regions of *Britannia Prima*, not because of deep-seated ideas about kingship amongst these peoples, but due to the differing types of interaction with the imperial authorities which existed in the western *civitates* during the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries.

In order to discuss these developments, it will be necessary to engage with the different models set out to explain the emergence of kingdoms amongst the Britons of the West, notably Dark's *civitas* to kingdom hypothesis and ethnogenesis theory. Ethnogenesis theory argues that rulers played a central role in the creation of late antique and early medieval kingdoms, whereby warrior-bands grouped around a leader slowly formed into an ethnic group or people through interaction with the Roman state; the end result being a distinct type of Romano-Germanic kingdom.[1] Circumstances amongst the Britons are complicated by their position as (former) Roman citizens; however, transformations did occur in the West British zone during the early medieval period, which include the creation of kingships, dynastic groups and 'peoples'. However, Edward James' dictum that 'peoples did not create kings, kings created peoples' will be questioned in relation to the formation of

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[1] See Ch. 1.

kingdoms within the western British zone.[2] As noted in chapter 1, Dark's theory of British political continuity in which *civitates* became kingdoms has not met with universal approval. Rather, scholars such as Chris Wickham have argued that in western Britain social structure was defined in terms of tribalism, where not much effort was required to create an elite.[3] It is true that western Britain was unique in certain respects, but terms such as 'tribal' seem an anachronistic and deeply-unsatisfactory manner in which to describe developments amongst the Britons of the West. We can approach the issue of kingship formation from a number of directions: the terms, vernacular and Latin, used to describe power and polities in early medieval western Britain; the sites used to communicate power and authority over the landscape; and the use of material culture. From this combined evidence we can attempt to reconfigure the dynamics of regional group identities, and ascertain the influences utilised to create such group identities. Indeed, this section will demonstrate that a range of influences, ancestral and Roman, shaped identities amongst the kingships and political groupings of the late antique West British zone.

The Eastern Zone

As we saw in the previous chapter, individuals were sometimes commemorated on Roman period funerary inscriptions as belonging to particular *civitates* in what became eastern *Britannia Prima*. In other cases inscriptions, whether milestones or building dedications, record the existence of cantonal identities in corporate form. Regionalism thus appears to have been a particularly strong unit of adherence.[4] Amongst the elite, power and identity were articulated in urban and rural contexts through civilian ideals which emphasised culture and education as the defining elements of aristocratic identity, again on an individual and

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[2] James, 'The Barbarian Kingdoms', pp. 47-8.

[3] Wickham, *Framing*, pp. 326-30.

[4] See Ch. 5.

regional basis. Further emphasis appears to have been placed on the contrasts between aristocratic landlord and rural peasantry, though not perhaps to the extent of causing unrest between social classes. Given the western distribution of the kings rebuked by Gildas, as discussed below, the question arises, therefore, how, or indeed whether, the elite of the easternmost *civitates* transformed themselves from an aristocracy defined by *otium* to a militarised nobility, defined by weapons-bearing.[5] As the eastern *civitates* of *Britannia Prima* are often categorised as part of the 'lowland zone', issues of political power and identity have sometimes been approached in relation to developments in the eastern districts of Roman Britain, the provinces of *Maxima* and *Flavia Caesariensis*, in what became the 'Anglo-Saxon' zone. On a broader scale, parallels have been drawn between lowland Britain and Gaul where changing conceptions of gender and social role are viewed as responses to the collapse of Roman aristocratic masculinity and the rise of the powerful image of barbarian militarised identity.[6]

Although the archaeological evidence for late fourth- and fifth-century Britain remains difficult to interpret, Gildas's historical section does give some indication that the lowland *civitates* possessed some form of military capability. First, however, we can turn to situation in Gaul in order to examine some of the responses to the unsettled circumstances of the fifth century. Here, when faced with barbarian encroachment Roman aristocrats such as Sidonius and others like him attempted to sustain, or even increase, their sense of privilege through cultivation of the literary and cultural aspects of their identity.[7] However, in the long-term such a strategy was insufficient to maintain the status of the secular nobleman. The late fourth and early fifth centuries were, consequently, a transitional period whereby landlords

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[5] For recent discussion of these matters, see J. Gerrard, *The Ruin of Britain* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 249-62.

[6] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 482-88.

[7] Mathisen, *Late Roman Gaul*, pp. 50-8.

sometimes became warlords.[8] This was common on the imperial frontiers where power, identity and status was traditionally connected with military *romanitas*.[9] However, in the late Roman period aristocrats in the civilian heartlands of Gaul and Spain were increasingly drawn, or forced, into adopting alternative, military strategies to maintain their authority. In certain senses, major landholders were in a position to exert such authority due to their control over vast labour sources which could be deployed as 'armies' in order to thwart enemies of the state, both domestic and foreign. This 'legitimate' use of violence is evident, for instance, in the actions of Didymus and Verinian, the kinsmen of the emperor Honorius who raised an army from amongst their own *coloni* in order to resist the troops of the usurper Constantine III.[10] Ostensibly, there was a ban on civilians bearing arms and groups internal to the empire that ignored this proscription were condemned and sometimes castiagated by terms such as *bacaudae*. At moments of crisis the ban could be lifted, such as during the Vandal invasion of the 440s when Valentinian III allowed civilians to arm themselves. However, it is evident that societies within the empire were full of illegitimate armed groups: even Italy during the reign of Septimius Severus found itself prey to a certain Bulla and his 600-strong band of retainers.[11] Again, we know nothing of internal issues in Britain though it would seem extremely doubtful that there were not armed groups who could be coopted in times of trouble, if necessary.

On other occasions, ostensibly civilian aristocrats raised bands of personal retainers in order to provide the local community protection against barbarians. Ecdicius, for instance, son of the emperor Avitus and brother-in-law to Sidonius Apollinaris, drove the Goths from

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[8] Whittaker, *Frontiers*, pp. 243-70; W. Liebeschuetz, 'Warlords and Landlords', in P. Erdkamp, *A Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 479-94, at pp. 485-91.

[9] Whittaker, *Frontiers*, pp. 264-5; Liebeschuetz, 'Warlords and Landlords', p. 480.

[10] Orosius, 7.40.7.

[11] Thompson, 'Peasant Revolts', 2-4.

Clermont-Ferrand with, allegedly, a band of only eighteen horsemen.[12] This type of self-help amongst civilian aristocrats, however, rarely led to the foundation of anything more secure, at least in terms of 'kingdoms' – these were temporary measures and such persons as Ecdicius were praised just as highly for their civic attributes as they were for their martial prowess.[13] In the late Roman period, then, violence as utilised by Roman civilian aristocrats remained an act of last resort. It was not the defining feature of their social identity, which continued, for the time being, to be expressed through the traditional pursuit of *otium*.

The textual evidence from late antique Britain is not of the type which allows us to examine the responses of Romano-British landlords to the altering circumstances of the late fourth and early fifth centuries in great detail. It appears to be the case that the *civitates* located (presumably) in eastern and central Roman Britain, in light of the inaction of the Constantinian regime in Britain or the continent, managed to repulse barbarian raiders sometime in the early fifth century.[14] This might suggest that some *civitates* had achieved a level of militarisation, perhaps from garrisons – whether *foederati* or regular Roman forces – stationed in towns, local militias, or private forces, *bucellari*, raised by civilian aristocrats. Even if some militarisation had occurred within the *civitates* it seems clear that regular Roman forces were required to maintain military superiority within the (former) diocese. We observe, for example, British requests for military assistance in the pages of Zosimus and Gildas, up until around the mid-point of the fifth century.[15] According to Gildas, of course, it was this lack of military capability amongst the Britons in the face of Pictish and Scottic raiding which necessitated the invitation to the Saxons. Whatever the identity of the *superbus tyrannus*, employment of 'Germanic' mercenaries to protect parts of the island from

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[12] Sidonius, *Ep*. 3.3.3-6; Gregory of Tours, *DLH*, ii.24.

[13] Sidonius, *Ep*. 3.3.2.

[14] Zosimus, 6.5.2-3.

[15] Zosimus, 6.10.2; Gildas, *DEB*, 20.

barbarian incursions would be entirely compatible with Roman 'policy'. Over the Roman period, Franks, Burgundians, Vandals and Alamanni had all been introduced into Britain to serve in a military capacity. Archaeological evidence also points to the introduction of 'Germanic' forces in central southern Britain.[16] In the post-Roman period, Gildas used the terms *epimenia*, 'monthly rations', and *annonae*, 'grain' when referring to the supply of the Saxon federates settled in eastern Britain.[17] This should, indeed, be taken as insight into the possible capabilities of communities in Gildas's own day to feed and supply military contingents, whatever their ethnic identity.

On other occasions, the Britons appealed to continental Roman society in matters of ecclesiastical dispute: the mission of St Germanus to combat Pelagianism around in 430 indicating that a civilian elite still existed in central southern Britain. On his first visit to Britain, Germanus encountered a man of tribunician rank.[18] Tribune was of course a military title,[19] suggesting a formal hierarchy existed within the areas visited by Germanus. If the tale of Germanus leading a British army against Saxons and Picts is, however, to be given any credence then it would suggest that the local elite were negligible in their military capabilities;[20] nonetheless, the Britons did have an army suggesting that the system providing monthly sustenance to Saxon federates existed in other regions of the former diocese and was used to support locally raised troops or, perhaps, to hire Irish federates.

Returning to the broader late antique context, if civilian elites only sporadically deployed violence to sustain their authority and usually relied upon others to do their fighting

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[16] P. Booth, 'A Late Roman Military Burial from the Dyke Hills, Dorchester on Thames, Oxfordshire', *Britannia* 45 (2014), 243-73, at 255-6.

[17] Gildas, *DEB*, 23.5: see Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 43-4.

[18] *Vita St. Germani*, §15.

[19] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 29.4.7.

[20] *Vita St. Germani*, §§17-18.

for them – whether regular Roman forces or federates – there were high-status official Roman military elites who commanded vast resources. Most prominent was one Flavius Aëtius (391-454) – the late Roman *dux et patricius* and 'thrice consul' to whom the Britons appealed.[21] Aëtius was sent in his youth as a hostage to the Huns. Nonetheless, he had a long and distinguished career in the Roman army, culminating with his famous victory over the Huns and the Battle of Catalaunian Plains (451) which ended the Hunnic threat to Gaul.[22] Significantly, Aëtius' force contained a number of federate contingents, including Franks and Goths. Perhaps alarmed at Aëtius's power and the possible threat an over-mighty general might pose to the imperial throne the emperor Valentinian III assassinated Aetius on 21 September 454.[23] Aëtius left no legacy or kingdom. Other Romano-Gallic commanders developed, over time, into more or less independently-minded warlords in particular the *magister militum per Gallias*, Aegidius, and his son, Syagrius.[24] Debate remains as to whether notice of Aegidius' elevation to the Frankish kingship and the status of Syagrius as *rex Romanorum* reflect contemporary titulature or retrospective insights by Gregory of Tours.[25] Whatever their precise designations, it is clear that at least one high military official of Gallic origin possessed control of substantial resources and was able to pass this military power to his son.

Turning to fifth-century Britain, it is possible that despite the preponderance of civilian elite ideals in the eastern *civitates* of *Britannia Prima* we may encounter a figure of comparable military status to the Gauls, Aegidius and Syagrius – Ambrosius Aurelianus. According to Gildas, Ambrosius Aurelianus, *vir modestus*, led the Britons to victory over the

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[21] Gildas, *DEB*, 20: on Aetius, see J. M. O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire* (Alberta, 1983), pp. 74-103; Whittaker, *Frontiers*, pp. 250-1.

[22] Priscus, Frag. 21, ed. Blockley, *FCHLRE*, p. 309; Gregory of Tours, *DLH*, ii.7.

[23] Priscus, Frag. 30, ed. Blockley, *FCHLRE*, pp. 327-9.

[24] P. MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 82-110.

[25] MacGeorge, *Warlords*, pp. 133-6.

Saxons during the 'War of the Saxon Federates'.[26] Gildas not only regarded Ambrosius as a Roman but he also implied that his parents had worn the purple: possibly he was the offspring of either Marcus or Gratian, two short-lived British emperors raised to the purple in 406/7. Although Ambrosius's Roman ancestry was essential to Gildas's argument, for he was loathe to credit individual Britons with military success, it is possible that Ambrosius presented himself as the legitimate wielder of Roman military authority, perhaps as *magister militum* or some other high military office.

Given its dual role as *civitas* and provincial capital, Cirencester seems a probable base for Ambrosius: in the late Roman period it was certainly a focal point in patronage networks, both for the production and dissemination of mosaics and high-status metalwork. Cirencester has, indeed, produced the largest concentrations of official metalwork outside London, notably belt-fittings decorated with outward-facing horse heads, brooches, and late fourth-century prick spurs.[27] Similar metalwork appears within the Silurian, Cornovian and Durotrigan *civitates*, no doubt identifying its bearers as provincial notables.[28] At Caerwent, for instance, late Roman high-status metalwork included a buckle of type I B with dolphin heads accompanied by a pair of outward-facing horse heads and the copper alloy buckle with triangular plate.[29] The extent to which this material culture contributed to the formation of a nascent 'Britishness' is unclear – late fourth- and early fifth-century *Britannia Prima* was,

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[26] Gildas, *DEB*, 25.3.

[27] A. Rogers, 'Metalworking and Late Roman Power: a study of towns in later Roman Britain', in J. Bruhn *et al* (eds.), *TRAC 2004: proceedings of the fourteenth annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 27-38, at pp. 29-30; J. M. Paddock, 'Military Equipment', in N. Holbrook (ed.), *Cirencester. The Roman Town Defences, Public Buildings and Shops*, Cirencester Excavations V (Cirencester, 1998), pp. 305-7; White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 71-2, 154; H. E. M. Cool, 'A different life', in Collins and Allason-Jones (eds.), *Finds from the Frontier*, pp. 1-9, at pp. 4-6.

[28] J. K. Knight, 'Late Roman and Post-Roman Caerwent: Some Evidence from Metalwork', *AC* 145 (1996), 34-65, at 40.

[29] Knight, 'Caerwent', Figs. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.

perhaps, no more 'British' than the other Britannic provinces. Regardless, the accumulation of military material culture at Cirencester and Caerwent is significant – the militarisation of high-status identities becoming central to the eventual transformation of the urban *civitates* in their development into *regiones*.

According to Dark, the fifth- and early sixth-century eastern *civitates* of *Britannia Prima* were under civilian government.[30] If, indeed, the transition from civilian aristocrat to noble war-leader was an uneasy one for the late Roman elite, we might ask what effect these developments had on the perpetuation of *civitas* identities in the eastern *civitates* of former *Britannia Prima*. Given that the social discourse that perpetuated high-status civilian identity had seemingly broken down with the decline of villa society in the late fourth and fifth centuries, cantonal identities might have suffered a similar fate. For example, unlike their Gallic counterparts, where towns became synonymous with the regional *civitas* population,[31] British towns in the course of the late antique period appear to have lost their association with their 'people', instead becoming symbolic of a wider territory. This appears to be the case with both *civitas*-capitals and local centres: for instance, *regio Guent*,[32] Gwent, was named from the Silurian capital *Venta*. Meanwhile, *regio Ercing*,[33] Ergyng, derived its name from the small Dobunnic town of *Ariconium*, Weston-under-Penyard. This occurred elsewhere in the former diocese where Brittonic groups retained political control: the *colonia* at *Lindum*, Lincoln, became *regio Linnuis*.[34] More speculatively, *Cataractonium*, Roman Catterick, may have become *Catraeth*.[35]

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[30] Dark, *Britain*, pp. 144-9.

[31] For instance, *Lutetia Parisiorum*, 'Lutetia of the Parisi', became Paris; Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul*, p. 105.

[32] *HB*, §70.

[33] *HB*, §73.

[34] T. Green, 'The British Kingdom of Lindsey', *CMCS* 56 (2008), 1-43, at 3-7.

[35] See Ch. 7.

In later Brittonic sources, as noted below, the term *regio* was applied to kingdoms regardless of their power and geographic size; some of these were named from former urban centres, also of varying administrative status, size and level of architectural sophistication. This suggests two interrelated processes were underway in late antique western Britain which affected the perpetuation of large-scale ancestral identities in the 'urbanised' cantons: fragmentation of the *civitates* and territorialisation of identities. Fragmentation or de-centralization of the *civitates* as socio-political territorial and identity units probably occurred, in part, as a result of the archaeologically-attested proliferation of local centres.[36] Proliferation of urban centres in the late Roman period is hinted at by Gildas's reference to the Britain of his own time possessing twenty-eight cities (*quaternis civitatibus* – a term referring here to 'town' rather than the wider canton).[37] There were fifteen *civitas*-capitals within diocesan Britain; the *coloniae* at Lincoln, Gloucester, York and Colchester, the provincial capital of London and the legionary fortresses at Chester and Caerleon might have also been considered 'towns'. Without a doubt, there was no post-Roman spurt in urban planning. The remaining six must have emerged in the later Roman period, with sites such as Ilchester (Dorset), Rochester (Kent) and Meole Brace (Shropshire) possible candidates. On the other hand, Gildas argued that the stone Wall linked a number of *civitates*.[38] Given that in an attempt to clarify Gildas's statement *Historia Brittonum* included hillforts, former Roman towns, and forts within the list of twenty-eight *civitates* suggests that later perceptions were varied as to what comprised a *civitas*.[39]

Fragmentation of the Dobunnic *civitas* probably occurred due to the presence of multiple urban centres within the canton, including the *colonia* at Gloucester. Cirencester was

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[36] Millet, *Romanization of Britain*, pp. 143-56.

[37] Gildas, *DEB*, 3.2.

[38] Gildas, *DEB*, 18.

[39] *HB*, §66.

the most important town and, as discussed above, this shows evidence of high-status activity in the late Roman period. An inscribed stone from Devon refers to one Dobunnus, though the extent to which this testifies to the preservation of Dobunnic identity into the sixth century is unclear. Fragmentation and territorialisation had perhaps taken hold of the former *civitas* by this date. Our most solid evidence to the fate of *civitas Dobunnorum* derives from the emergence of *regio Ercing*, the former small town of Ariconium. The origins of *regio Ercing* as an independent political unit are obscure; it would seem likely that it had achieved some local significance in the late Roman period and that this process continued into the post-Roman era as the *civitates* lost their coherence under internal and external pressures.

Within the Durotrigan *civitas* similar processes appear to have occurred, with the canton possessing two social and economic centres: *Durnovaria*, Dorchester, and *Lindinis*, Ilchester. As we have seen, both were integral to local patronage networks, as revealed by the distribution of mosaics produced at each town. Ilchester's status is confirmed by inscriptions from the Wall, which testify to the existence of *civitas Durotragum Lendiniensis*, 'the civitas of the Durotriges of Lindinis'.[40] Association of people and town at Ilchester might reflect an underlying local sentiment possessed by the Ilchester and Dorchester groups, linked to their respective hillforts of South Cadbury and Maiden Castle, both of which held local cultic significance in the Roman period.[41] We do not know how long Durotrigan identity persisted into the post-Roman period; perhaps a *civitas*-wide identity was under threat from increased local patriotism connected to the rise of Ilchester and its recognition by the Roman administration. If we consider the political development of the Durotrigan *civitas* in analogy with the postulated Dobunnic experience, *Lindinis* and *Durnovaria* would seem probable candidates for later fifth- or sixth-century territorial units. As we shall see, the reoccupation

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[40] *RIB*, 1673, 1673.

[41] White, *Britannia Prima*, p. 78.

of South Cadbury certainly points towards the creation of a political unit or *regio* in the Ilchester area.

The situation within *civitas Cornoviorum* is complex. Earlier Roman period epigraphic evidence reveals that cantonal identity was strong amongst the Cornovii; with *Viroconium*, Wroxeter, the Cornovian *civitas*-capital, the centre for such expression.[42] The continuing centrality of *Viroconium* to the perpetuation of Cornovian identity into the fifth and sixth century remains unclear. The town has been held up as the quintessential late antique site in western Britain, standing almost uniquely as an example of urban continuity in the face of the overwhelming evidence for the decline and abandonment of towns in the late Roman period. White and Barker have, indeed, argued that the occupation sequence at Wroxeter extends into the sixth and seventh centuries.[43] The town's apogee supposedly took place between *c*. 530 and *c*. 650 and witnessed the reconstitution of the baths-basilica complex area, with the masonry structure demolished and replaced by a three-storey high-status residence built to Roman measurements, but in timber rather than stone. Indeed, this structure was allegedly situated amid the heart of a functioning late antique town with an active market and vibrant urban community.[44]

This interpretation is now under scrutiny. Rather, Alan Lane views Wroxeter as conforming to the wider pattern of urban failure in late Roman Britain, which came to a head in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.[45] In particular, Lane has cast doubt on the date of the rubble platform which allegedly supported the timber-framed building, the absence of any evidence for the buildings themselves and the complete lack of post-400 artefacts from the

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[42] See Ch. 5.

[43] See White and Barker, *Wroxeter*, 118-36; White, *Britannia Prima*, pp. 188, 190.

[44] P. Barker *et al*, *The Baths Basilica Wroxeter: Excavation 1966-90* (London, 1997), pp. 240-1

[45] Lane, 'Wroxeter', 509-13.

area.[46] It could have previously been argued that as Wroxeter was marginal to the areas participating in trade with Gaul and the Mediterranean, the absence of such material was insignificant; however, Wroxeter is to be contrasted with finds from nearby sites, such as New Pieces, a mere 30km west of Wroxeter. Here, on a spur hill below Breiddin hillfort was a small enclosed site containing timber buildings, defended by a bank and ditch. Finds consisted of early medieval glass, including seven cone beakers and a glass bowl, Phocaean Red Slip (PRS) ware and *dérivées sigillées paléochrétiennes* (DSP). Material reached the site in modest amounts only and was perhaps the product of diplomatic exchanges with groups further west. It might be thought to signal *romanitas*, though of course a taste for wine cannot be ruled out either as a motivating factor. Nonetheless, possession of such objects, or rather their contents, would have been essential for forming hierarchal relationships and spoke of the power and influence of the 'importer' in gaining these products in the first instance as well as his ability to redistribute the contents to his favoured clients and retainers.

The absence of this imported, high-status material from Wroxeter would suggest that the former town was not the full-time residence of a powerful individual, whether bishop or warlord. There was, however, important late activity at the site exemplified by the early medieval inscribed raised stone in memory of the Irish-named Cunorix.[47] Perhaps Cunorix was an Irish federate leader, hired to protect Wroxeter and its hinterland. In itself, however, this monument is not proof of occupation as inscribed stones were sometimes raised on former Roman sites regardless of the date they were abandoned.[48] Wroxeter, therefore, perhaps witnessed only sporadic occupation or use, retaining symbolic importance as part of the ancestral landscape, maybe functioning as an inauguration or ceremonial site.

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[46] Lane, 'Wroxeter', 505-9.

[47] Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, I, S2.

[48] See Ch. 5.

Other evidence is also of value in understanding the continuing importance of Wroxeter and Cornovian identity in the earliest medieval centuries. For instance, the poem *Trawsganu Kynan Garwyn*, which appears in the manuscript *Llyfr Taleisin* compiled in the fourteenth century,[49] composed in honour of Cynan ap Brochfael (*fl.* 580-600), suggests that Cornovian identity was territorialised as Cernyw.[50] The poem's tone is victorious and extols Cynan's power over the other regions of early medieval Wales. Debate remains, however, about the dating of this poem. Graham Isaac has put forth an interesting argument that this poem was a tenth-century composition which praised the ancestors of the rulers of Powys. According to Isaac, the *kernyw* of the poem refers to the Cornwall of the south-west, an entity which only became discernible as a distinct political unit after the West Saxon conquest of Devon.[51] However, Charles-Edwards and Haycock favour a sixth century date; indeed, there seems something inherently problematic in viewing the supposed tenth-century author choosing a contemporary name for Cornwall when he allegedly was able to use older sources such as Gildas which would have informed him of the existence of Dumnonia. Here, then, the phrase *kernyw kyfarchet* has been taken as a contemporary reference to Cynan ap Brochfael's hegemonic aspirations.

According to Charles-Edwards the poem recalls conflict between the *pagenses*, led by Cynan ap Brochfael and the Cornovii of Wroxeter; the 'distinction between Powys and Cernyw', representing a 'prime example of the disintegration of kingdoms based on old *civitates*'.[52] *Kyfarchet* can be explained in two ways: first, as *cyfarch,* 'to greet', 'salute' 'request', 'summon' and so forth;[53] or, the meaning favoured by Haycock and Charles-

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[49] For discussion of the Book of Talesin, see Ch. 7.

[50] *Trawsganu Kynan Garwyn*, *PT*, I.16. M. Haycock in Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 16.

[51] Isaac, '*Trawganu Kynan mab Brochuael*', 173-8.

[52] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 16.

[53] *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, 4 vols., (Cardiff, 1950-67), I, p. 680.

Edwards, *cyfarth*, 'to attack' 'threaten' and so on.[54] Either Cynan greeted *kernyw*, perhaps a reference to the summoning of men to his host, or he threatened *kernyw*, which given the tone of the poem seems more likely. *Cyfarth* can also be translated as 'to bark'.[55] Indeed, this might be seen as the most viable rendering, particularly if it is regarded as a pun on the name 'Cynan' which held a positive association with 'hound' in Brittonic kingship.[56]

Cynan was part of the Cadelling, 'the descendants of Cadell'.[57] According to *Historia Brittonum*, the progenitor of this dynasty, Cadell, rose to prominence under the blessing of St Germanus after a fire at the hillfort of Moel Fenlli consumed the wicked tyrant, Benlli.[58] Consequently, Cadell and his line became the 'rightful seed' of Powys.[59] Given the location of Moel Fenlli in northeast Wales, this dynastic group have been associated with Iâl. The lands around Chester in what is now western England were also under their authority: Cynan's son Selyf opposed Æthelfrith of the Bernicii at Chester probably fought probably in 615.[60] This date is approximate, however, as the entry in *Annales Cambriae* may derive ultimately from the Chronicle of Ireland, which took its information from the Iona chronicle which was possibly one or two years out of sync.[61] However, the Cadelling's right to rule within Powys was contested by the Cyndrwynyn, the 'descendants of Cyndrwyn, represented by Cynddylan, the ally of Penda of the Mercians (642-655). For instance, the saga poem

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[54] *GPC*, p. 684.

[55] *GPC*, p. 684.

[56] Cf. Gildas, *DEB*, 30.1; K. H. Jackson, '*Varia*: II. Gildas and the Names of the British Princes', *CMCS* 3 (Summer 1982), 30-40, at 31; Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn', pp. 56-7.

[57] P. Sims-Williams, 'Powys and Early Welsh Poetry', *CMCS* 67 (Summer 2014), 33-54; O. W. Jones, '*Hereditas Pouoisi*: The Pillar of Eliseg and the History of Early Powys', *WHR* 24 (2009), 41-80; J. Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* (Woodbridge, 1990), pp. 125-36, 182-3.

[58] *HB*, §32-4.

[59] *HB*, §35.

[60] Bede, *HE*, ii.2; *Annales Cambriae*, 613.

[61] Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, i. 128, n. 1.

Canu Heledd lauds Cynddylan ap Cyndrwyn with the epithet 'Powys'.[62] Furthermore, *Marwnad Cynddylan* marks the Cadelling out as enemies of the Cyndrwynyn. Both *Canu Heledd* and *Marwnad Cynddylan* situate the Cyndrwynyn in the lands surrounding the former Cornovian *civitas*-capital. If *Trawsganu Kynan* is authentic, then Cornovian identity persisted into the later sixth century, albeit in territorial form. The Cyndrwynyn might then be seen as the ruling dynasty of Cernyw.

What perhaps remained of *Viroconium* in the early middle ages was the significance of its name as a territorial or population designation: the saga poetry refers to the Wrekin hillfort as *Dinlle Ureconn*, clearly derivative of *Viroconium*.[63] However, Rowlands has suggested much of this political geography is late and probably derived from English influenced place-names, evidenced by sites such as Baschurch.[64] The *Tribal Hidage*, a document of disputed provenance noting the number of hides held by the peoples and kingdoms dominated by either the Mercians or Northumbrians,[65] refers to the *Wreocensætna*, 'the people who dwelt around the Wrekin'. Here, the Anglo-Saxons had perhaps changed a territorial designation based on *Viroconium* into a 'people' name; a similar process had affected the representation of the former north British kingdom of Elmet within the *Tribal Hidage*. The overall impression is that the town itself had lost its importance but the name had been transferred to the hillfort, though it could have represented a wider territory. Neither sources give the impression that Cornovian identity still persisted; rather it was a small scale

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[62] *Canu Heledd*, ed. and trans. J. Rowlands, *EWSP*, pp. 483-94, pp. 174-9.

[63] Rowlands, *EWSP*, pp. 603-4.

[64] Rowlands, *EWSP*, p. 139.

[65] N. Brooks, 'The Formation of the Mercian Kingdom, in Bassett (ed.), *Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, pp. 159-70, at pp. 160, 167.

population unit or a territory most readily identified as the hereditary possession of the Cyndrwynyn dynastic group and named, at least in *Canu Heledd* as Powys.[66]

The association of the Cadelling with Powys appears to have been established quite clearly by the ninth century, as related by *Historia Brittonum*. The name Powys undoubtedly derives from Latin *pagus*, the sub-division of the *civitas*; however, there is nothing specific about the *pagenses* which should necessarily assign them to Cornovian territory.[67] *Trawsganu Kynan Garwyn* implies that Cynan came from outside Cernyw – that is, the area from which he ruled was already established. In fact, *Historia Brittonum* refers to this group as a population unit, *regio Povisorum*, rather than a territorial entity.[68] Perhaps the use of the generic term *pagenses*, 'country people', 'local people' was intentional, a tool to describe the wider authority of an emergent dynasty without limiting them to one geographic territory or former *civitas* identity. It might also be considered that this 'people name' was reflective of the position of the Cadelling and Cyndrwynyn on the frontiers of former *Britannia Prima* – that is, was *regio Povisorum* somehow comparable to *gens Merciorum*, 'the people of the March', as a descriptive term for peoples on the boundaries of Brittonic territory?

In the eastern regions of former *Britannia Prima*, a number of processes appear to have been underway. Territorialisation was the most common: whether or not a *civitas* identity persisted into the earliest medieval centuries, polities were referred to, by and large, as territorial units. The survival of *civitates* was possibly undermined in cantons with multiple urban centres. In the late and immediately post-Roman period, some large-scale landlords may have created retinues, though the extent to which such forces led to the permanent establishment of kingships is uncertain. Nonetheless, kingship appears to have developed by

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[66] Sims-Williams, 'Powys, 44-50; Jones, '*Hereditas Pouoisi*', 47-52.

[67] Sims-Williams 'Powys', 33.

[68] *HB*, §35; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 14.

the later sixth century, being particularly prominent in the former Cornovian *civitas* and surrounding areas. We turn now to the circumstances in the western sectors of former *Britannia Prima*.

The Western Zone

As Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* makes clear, kingship existed amongst the sixth-century Britons; however, his work and other textual and archaeological evidence suggests that it was within the peripheral upland regions of former *Britannia Prima* where kingship was most firmly established. Here, also, there appears to have been greater continuity in ancestral identities – albeit in territorialised form – than in areas further to the east, though some 'peoples' survived into the fifth century and, indeed, beyond.

Kingship had, according to Gildas, formed amongst the Britons sometime after the failed appeal Aetius (*c*. 453), with kings being selected and then overthrown when deemed not cruel enough by their electors.[69] The location and identity of these kings, however, is uncertain; it has been suggested that these were the short-lived emperors Marcus and Gratian,[70] although the sequence of events would appear to rule this out. Kingship by the sixth century was, then, well-established and this is most clearly evidenced in Gildas's denunciation of five contemporary kings – Constantinus, Aurelius Caninus, Vortiporus, Cuneglasus and Maglocunus.[71] Although laced with a certain degree of venom, Gildas's admonishment was directed towards the kings in order that they might repent and, once again, find the path of righteousness. Gildas's personal rebuke of the kings is prefaced with a generalised appraisal of the failings of British kingship:

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[69] *DEB*, 21.4.

[70] George, *Gildas and the Early British Church*, p. 49, n. 5; Woolf, 'Romans to Barbarians', p. 354.

[71] *DEB*, 28-35.

Reges habet Britannia, sed tyrannos; iudices habet, sed impios; saepe praedantes

et concutientes, sed innocentes; vindicantes et patrocinantes, sed reos et latrones;

quam plurimas coniuges habentes, sed scortas et adulterantes; crebro iurantes,

sed periurantes; voventes, sed continuo propemodum mentientes; belligerantes,

sed civilian et iniusta bella agentes; per patriam quidam fures magnopere

insectantes, sed eos qui secum ad mensam sedant non solum amantes sed et

munerantes; eleemosynas largiter dantes, sed e regione inmensum montem

scelerum exaggerantes; in sede arbitraturi sedentes, sed raro recti iudicii regulam

quaerentes; innoxios humilesque despicientes, sanguinarios superbus parricidas

commanipulares et adulteros dei inimicos, si sors, ut dicitur, tulerit, qui cum ipso

nomine certatim delendi errant, ad sidera, prout possunt, efferentes; vinctos plures

in carceribus habentes, quos dolo sui potius quam merito proterunt catenis

onerantes, inter altaria iurando demorantes et haec eadem ac si lutulenta paulo

post saxa despicientes.[72]

Britain has kings, but they are tyrants; she has judges but they are wicked. They
often plunder and terrorize – the innocent; but defend and protect – the guilty and
thieving; they have many wives – whores and adulteresses; they constantly swear
– false oaths; they make vows – but almost at once tell lies; they wage wars – civil
and unjust; they chase thieves energetically all over the country – but love and
even reward the thieves who sit with them at table; they distribute alms profusely –
but pile up an immense mountain of crime for all to see; they take their seat as
judges – but rarely seek out the rules of right judgement; they despise the harmless
and humble, but exalt to the stars, so far as they can, their fellow soldiers, bloody,
arrogant and murderous men, adulterers and enemies of God – if chance, as they
say, so allows: men who should have been rooted out vigorously, name and all;
they keep many prisoners in their gaols, who are more often loaded with chafing

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[72] Gildas, *DEB*, 27.

chains because of intrigue then because they deserve punishment. They hang
around altars swearing oaths – then shortly afterwards scorn them as though they
were dirty chains.

In revealing the failings of contemporary British kingship, this passage nonetheless speaks to the type of behaviour Gildas expected of kings, as well as the basis of their power and societal functions. Gildas's rebuke stems from the tyrannical actions of these kings; however, kingship itself was not illegitimate. The swearing of false oaths, the violation of holy places and other offences against God typified the kings' use of their personal power for illicit gain. This was manifest in the kings' predilection for illegitimate civil war and conflict with their fellow *cives*. However, warfare was not unChristian: Gildas had celebrated victory against the Saxons, although he had argued that British success was dependent in trusting in God and/or Roman leadership.

Royal power was dependent upon the relationship between ruler and retinue or *teulu*.[73] These *commanipulares*, 'fellow soldiers', 'military companions', served to enforce the king's will and, as is clear from Gildas, sat with the king at table and received reward from his hand. Gildas states that the kings and their retinues 'plunder and terrorize the innocent', perhaps a reference to the forcible extraction of royal tribute from the general population. Kings, and indeed their companions, were also criticised for taking numerous wives or concubines – this was common practice amongst early medieval Brittonic kings (and of course those elsewhere). Indeed, taking of multiple partners by Welsh rulers continued be an intrinsic part of royal behaviour into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,

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[73] S. Davis, 'The *Teulu*: *c.* 633-1283', *WHR* 21 (2003), 413-54, at 438-53.

where conflicts between half-brothers and cousins, often supported by their foster-brothers, were regular features of succession disputes.[74]

As for the terminology of rulership, it has been observed that *rex* is the most common term applied in the sources to early medieval rulers in Wales.[75] Gildas stands at the head of this historiographical tradition. However, the, albeit limited, fifth- and sixth-century epigraphic evidence indicates that rulers sometimes used non-royal terms redolent of imperial power, such as *magistratus* and *protictor* to express their authority.[76] Indeed, non-royal titles were popular amongst the barbarian rulers of post-Roman western Europe, though royal documentation amongst the barbarian kingdoms dating from the fifth to seventh centuries often identifies individual rulers as *rex*.[77] From an epigraphic perspective, *rex* first appears on the epitaph of Cadfan (d. 625), the seventh-century ruler of Gwynedd.[78] Gildas's model of kingship was, in all probability, based on the bible – and it was against this standard that his contemporaries were judged. It seems possible, therefore, that Old Testament kingship influenced Gildas's choice of the term *rex*.

Vernacular texts also have various terms which are seen as cognate with *rex*. According to Charles-Edwards, such terminology reflects the 'native element' in Brittonic kingship.[79] Prominent amongst such 'native' terms were *rhi* and *brenin*, seen, for example, in the *Gododdin* where the poet refers to one Gorthyn Hir of Rhufoniog as, *mab brenhin*

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[74] J. B. Smith, 'Dynastic succession in medieval Wales', *BBCS* (1986), 199–232, at 210-15.

[75] W. Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Wales* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 10-13.

[76] Magistratus: Edwards, *Corpus*, III, MR8 (Ffestioniog); Protictor: Edwards, *Corpus*, II, CM3 (Castell Dwyran).

[77] A. Gillet, 'Was Ethnicity Politicized in the Earliest Medieval Kingdoms', in *idem* (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity*, pp. 85-121, at pp. 91-105.

[78] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, AN26.

[79] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 318-22; R. M. Andrews, 'The Nomenclature of Kingship in Welsh Court Poetry 1100-1300 Part I: The Terms', *SC* 44 (2010), 79-109, at 89-106.

teithiauc, 'the son of a rightful king'.[80] An inscription, moreover, from Clocaenog (Denbighshire), commemorates one Similin(i)us Tovisacos; the second name or patronymic here has been interpreted as the ancestor in the genitive case of Welsh *tywysog*, 'leader', 'prince'.[81] In the earliest medieval centuries, then, political authority could be expressed with equal dynamism though vernacular or Latin terms.

Again, it is important to stress that kingship as an institution was legitimate. Rather, for Gildas, it was the actions of individual kings that rendered their personal leadership invalid, as revealed by Gildas's statement that Britain's kings were tyrants. Nonetheless, Gildas regarded *tyranni* as a peculiarly British phenomenon. According to Gildas, tyrants had existed in Britain's pre-Roman past, although tyrannical behaviour was most notably associated with Magnus Maximus. Crimes against God seem to have been one prominent method by which tyrant status was attained, at least in Gildas's view.[82] Of course, the term *tyrannus* derives from Roman nomenclature, although it is possible that Gildas's use of Latin *tyrannus* was a reaction to the contemporary British use of the vernacular term *tigernos*, 'good' or 'powerful lord'.[83] Indeed, parallels can perhaps be drawn with Salvian of Marseilles description of the problems facing northern Gaul and Armorica in the mid fifth century:

> *Quae enim sunt non modo urbes sed etiam municipia atque vici, ubi non quot curiales fuerint, tot tyranni sunt? Quamquam forte hoc nomine gratulentur quia potens et honoratum esse videatur.*

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[80] *CA*, ed. Williams, LXXXVII, 1095. The variant of this stanza (LXXXVII, 1072) has *mab teyrn teithiawc*.

[81] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, DI, pp. 317, 319.

[82] See Ch. 4.

[83] C. Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants. Britain and the Britons AD 400-600* (Stroud, 1998), pp. 106-8.

What towns, as well as what municipalities and villages are there in which there are not as many tyranni as curiales? Perhaps they glory in this name tyranni because it seems to be considered powerful and honoured.[84]

Here, Salvian draws a contrast between the curiales and the tyrants, between legitimate and illegitimate power and its application in the locality. For Salvian, tyrannical leadership was multiplying at an alarming rate; however, he was aware that the status of such leaders was exalted by the very use of the label *tyrannus*. Salvian appears not to have understood the honour placed in the term *tyranni* by the population of northern Gaul, for in this context it is likely to have referred not to be the maligned 'usurper' but to be the revered *tigernos*.

For Salvian and his audience of southern Gallic aristocrats and ecclesiastics, northern Gaul was a distinctly foreign place where inversions of the political order could occur. If tyrants could dominate the political landscape of northern Gaul, it is reasonable to conclude that similar cultural and political developments could pertain in western Britain, particularly in the upland regions. The element 'tigern' indeed appears frequently in early medieval Brittonic compound names, such as Kentigern and Cattegirn, although doubts have been raised as to whether Gildas's *superbus tyrannus* was simply a Latinization of the Brythonic name Vortigern.[85] *Teyrn* appears in the Taliesin poems as a means to describe Urien.[86] The possibility exists, then, that Gildas deliberately attacked the honoured terms by which contemporary rulers defined their status.

Gildas use of *iudices*, 'judges' also seems to have been inspired by a biblical model.[87] The term, however, had practical application with contemporary Brittonic society: kings sat

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[84] Salvian of Marseille, *De Gubernatione Dei*, 5.18.

[85] Jackson, '*Varia* II', 36-8.

[86] *PT*, 3.20, 24: see Ch. 7.

[87] George, *Gildas and the early British Church*, pp. 65-6.

in judgement, though according to Gildas in practice their rulings were rarely, if ever, legitimate. It is evident that the kings attempted to maintain a semblance of law, using their judicial power to vanquish robbers and detain criminals, though for Gildas this was done for personal aggrandisement. Was the kings' failure to seek out the 'rules of right judgement' in these matters Gildas's own estimation on the validity of the laws practised in the royal courts: that is, it followed some form of secular, provincial law rather than those set out in the bible?[88] Given the judicial functions assigned to kings by Gildas, *reges* and *iudices* were perhaps different terms for the same individuals. Again, it might be wondered whether Gildas's comments bear direct relation to the conceptualisation of authority in sixth-century western Britain, with rulers using this term to signify their power. It certainly had late Roman connotations, Ammianus, for instance, using *iudices* for high-ranking military officials.[89] Barbarian kings such as Athanric also preferred to be addressed as *iudex* rather than king. The northern British king, Gwallawg, seems to be referred to in the vernacular as *ynad*, 'judge', suggesting similar conceptions of authority in northern Britain.[90]

The Five Kings

With this background in mind, we can turn to Gildas's admonishment of the five kings. The first to receive rebuke was Constantinus.[91] According to Gildas, Constantinus was guilty of violating sacred ground and crimes against fellow *cives* with the slaying of his nephews, two royal youths (*regiorum tenerrima puerorum*).[92] Constantinus was evidently part of a royal kindred. Constantinus suffered further rebuke for putting away his lawful wife and committing adulteries, though of course this was a common feature of royal behaviour

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[88] P. Schaffner, 'Britain's *iudices*', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *GNA*, pp. 151-6.

[89] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 29.4.5.

[90] See Ch. 7.

[91] *DEB*, 28.

[92] *DEB*, 28.1-2.

throughout early medieval Britain and Europe. Constantinus' name of course evokes the Roman past – it might be seen as a reference to Constantine I, who was raised to the purple in Britain. Alternatively, it might be seen as a reference to Constantine III, the more recent British usurper of the early fifth century whose actions could still have been recalled in in the sixth. That the Dumnonian dynasty were concerned with the Brittonic military past might also be revealed in the naming of the seventh-century king, Gerontius, perhaps in emulation of *comes* Gerontius, the British general who accompanied Constantine to Gaul and later rebelled against him.[93] Both Constantine and Gerontius, then, might be seen not as 'Roman' names *per se* but as military names associated with the Brittonic past. Concern with the ancestral past is most clearly discerned in Gildas's description of Constantinus as *inmundae leaenae Damnoniae tyrannicus catulus*, 'tyrannical whelp of the foul lioness of Dumnonia'.[94] There is little doubt that this was a reference to Constantinus's rulership of the former *civitas Dumnoniorum*, the association between king and territory implying control over a distinct region and the people within it.

Gildas's second target was one Aurelius Caninus.[95] Aurelius was supposedly guilty of parricides, fornications, and adulteries (*parricidiorum, fornicationum adulteriorumque*).[96] Aurelius was also condemned for plundering and bringing civil war against his *patria* – that is, Britain. As Gildas warned Aurelius of his father and brothers' untimely deaths, it is evident that Aurelius belonged to a royal kindred.[97] The notion of 'throne-worthy' individual within royal dynasties was important in early medieval Europe, evident, for example,

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[93] Orosius, 7.42.4.

[94] *DEB*, 28.1.

[95] *DEB*, 30.

[96] *DEB*, 30.1.

[97] *DEB*, 30.1-2.

amongst the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks.[98] In later Welsh terms, Aurelius would have been considered an 'expected one', *gvrthdrych*.[99] Aurelius is a name of undoubted 'Roman' pretensions – it was commonly adopted by enfranchised citizens prior to the Edict of 212.[100] Aurelius Caninus is surely to be considered amongst the descendants who had failed to emulate the great Ambrosius Aurelius, the leader responsible for the salvation of the *cives*.[101] If Gildas was following a geographical sequence from southwest to northwest,[102] Aurelius could perhaps be located somewhere in former Dobunnic or Durotrigan territory which would of course place him in the eastern section of former *Britannia Prima*.

Next comes Vortiporus. According to Gildas Vortiporus was the *boni regis nequam fili*, 'bad son of a good king'.[103] Vortiporus seems to be the eldest of the five kings, his head already whitening. Again, Vortiporus was guilty of murders and adulteries, the most heinous of his crimes the rape of his 'shameless daughter' (*impudentis filiae*) following the death of his wife.[104] Vortiporus was *Demetarum tyranne*, 'tyrant of the Demetae', the people of south-western Wales – the former *civitas Demetorum*. As with Constantinus, here we have some evidence for continuity of identities; however, Vortiporus controlled a people, the Demetae, rather than a territorial unit. Later Welsh sources persisted in conceptualising the Demetae as a people.[105] The other notable case of 'peoples' surviving into the fifth century is that of the Ordovices, who appear on the Penbryn stone from Ceredigion.[106] The Ordovicians, however,

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[98] D. N. Dumville, 'The ætheling: a study of Anglo-Saxon constitutional history', *ASE* 8 (1979), 1-33; E. Goosmann, 'The long-haired kings of the Franks: "like so many Samsons?"', *EME* 20 (2012), 233-59.

[99] See, Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 329-335, at p. 329.

[100] Sherwin-White, *Roman Citizenship*, pp. 386-8.

[101] *DEB*, 25.3.

[102] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 210.

[103] *DEB*, 31.1.

[104] *DEB*, 31.1.

[105] *AC*, 808: *Regin rex Demetorum*.

[106] See Ch. 5.

were soon replaced by territorial *Venedos*. The Demetae, unlike the *Povisorum*, the other

notable population entity of this period, claimed to be the direct descendants of Iron Age and

Roman period population of southwest Wales; presumably this reflected the group's self-

perception rather than Gildas's own view. Retention of the ancestral names is more

extraordinary when considered against the evidence for Irish settlement within the *civitas*, as

discussed in chapter 5. We might have expected a transformation of identities as happened

amongst the Ordovices in northern Wales. Despite the greater archaeological visibility of the

Irish in Pembrokeshire, perhaps these settlers were more integrated into local society, with

the dynasty that emerged there desirous to harness the power of the ancestral past.

The penultimate king is Cuneglasus. His crimes are similar to the other kings, the

conduct of warfare against fellow *cives* causing Gildas particular anguish. Again, however, it

is Cuneglasus' sexual licentiousness that draws opprobrium from Gildas – the rejection of his

wife and the bedding of her sister, apparently marked out for the church, particular signs of

Cuneglasus' wickedness.[107] Gildas's depiction of Cuneglasus as the 'driver of the chariot of

the bear's stronghold'[108] might help us locate this king: it is seen as a reference to the hillfort

of Dineirth, 'fort of the Bear', on the northeast coast near Colwyn Bay.[109] Cuneglasus might,

then, be the ruler of Rhos. This is plausible enough, though other sites in Wales also bore this

name.[110] Cuneglasus' association with Rhos has led scholars to identify this ruler with one

'Cinglas', according to the Harleian genealogies cousin to Maelgwn Gwynedd and great-

grandson of Cunedda.[111]

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[107] *DEB*, 32.2.

[108] *DEB*, 32.1.

[109] Jackson, '*Varia* II', 34.

[110] E.g. Dineirth (Ceredigion): see Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn', p. 58, with n. 30.

[111] *HG*, no. 3. Jackson, '*Varia* II', 34; D. E. Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies* (Oxford, 2003),
pp. 80-2.

The denunciation of the five kings culminates with a certain Maglocunus. Gildas devotes the most attention to Maglocunus, in part because he was the most powerful king of the five:

> *Quid tu enim, insularis draco, multorum tyrannorum depulsor tam regno quam etiam vita supra dictorum, novissime stilo, prime in malo, maior multis potentia simulque malitia, largior in dando, profusior in peccato, robuste armis, sed anime fortior excidiis, Maglocune.*

> What of you, dragon of the island, you who have removed many of these tyrants from their kingdom and even their life? You are last in my list, but first in evil, mightier than many both in power and malice, more profuse in giving, more extravagant in sin, strong in arms but stronger in what destroys a soul, Maglocunus.[112]

Maglocunus clearly exerted some form of hegemony amongst contemporary kings, although it is unclear as to whether this extended to those other rulers attacked by Gildas. The creation of Maglocunus' overlordship, which had involved the removal of numerous tyrants from their lives and kingdoms, perhaps corresponded, more or less, to the extent of 'greater Gwynedd' as articulated in *Historia Brittonum* and the Harleian genealogies.[113] That the rulers of northern Wales, whether as the territory of the Ordovices or as *Venedos*, aspired to such hegemony has been discussed in relation to the raising of inscribed stones in northern and mid-Wales during the fifth and sixth centuries.[114] Indeed, it is likely that Maglocunus was a kinsmen of Maglos, the *magistratus* mentioned on the Cantiorix stone from Penmachno. Undoubtedly, Gildas was particularly well informed in respect of Maglocunus' rise to power,

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[112] *DEB*, 33.1.

[113] *HB*, §62; *HG*, no. 32, 33.

[114] See Ch. 5.

informing us that in Maglocunus' youth (*adulescentia*), he had destroyed the previous king, his uncle.[115] Perhaps for Gildas the worst of Maglocunus' sins derived from him taking the habit of a monk and then rejecting the calling when he had promised himself to God. The renunciation of this vow marked, for Gildas, Maglocunus' descent into further sinfulness, which culminated in the murder of his nephew and the marriage of the deceased's widow.[116]

Maglocunus has been identified with Maelgwn Gwynedd.[117] Maelgwn features prominently in *Historia Brittonum*,[118] *Annales Cambriae*[119] and the Harleian genealogies.[120] From the genealogical evidence, moreover, Maglocunus-Maelgwn has been declared cousin to Cuneglasus and nephew to the latter's father, Eugein *dantguin*, apparently the uncle slain by Maglocunus-Maelgwn in his seizure of the kingship.[121] Later medieval rulers of Gwynedd such as Owain Gwynedd, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth and his grandson Llywelyn ap Gruffudd were compared to Maelgwn or referred to as the Maelgyning, 'the descendants of Maelgwn' in court poetry.[122]

How far back Maelgyning identity extended is difficult to tell; the absence of poetry in praise or commemoration of Gwynedd's rulers prior to the mid-twelfth century adds a level of obscurity to the discussion. However, the tenth-century genealogical material indicates that by this point Maelgwn was considered an apical figure in the ancestry of the Gwynedd kings. If the untitled poem attributed to Taliesin in honour of Gwallawg of Elmet is

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[115] *DEB*, 33.4.

[116] *DEB*, 35.1-4.

[117] Jackson, '*Varia*: II', 34; Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn', pp. 56-9; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 210.

[118] *HB*, §62.

[119] *Annales Cambriae*, 551 [547].

[120] *HG*, no. 1.

[121] *DEB*, 33.4; HG, no. 3. Jackson, '*Varia*: II', 34; Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn', pp. 56-9.

[122] E.g. 'Arwyrain Owain Gwynedd' *Gweith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr II*, eds. N. A. Jones and A. P. Owen (Cardiff, 1995), pp. 22-3, line 43.

a genuine composition of the late sixth century, then we have evidence that Maelgyning dynastic identity had emerged in the decades after Maelgwn's death around the middle of the sixth century.[123] Here, the poet refers to a certain *owein mon maelgyning*.[124] Unfortunately, the Harleian genealogies reveal no suitable candidates for a sixth-century 'Owain Môn' amongst the descendants of Maelgwn. Later Gwynedd kingship was certainly connected to the control of Môn, Anglesey, the recognised heartlands of medieval Gwynedd, perhaps as a consequence or interpretation of Gildas's depiction of Maglocunus as *insularis draco*, 'dragon of the island'.[125] While the Maelgyning had emerged as a recognisable dynastic entity by eighth century at the latest, it is possible that the 'Gwallawg' poem was composed or reinterpreted at the court of Owain Gwynedd (1137-70), where interest in the events of the sixth-century Heroic Age was palpable.[126] Gildas's depiction of Maglocunus might, indeed, be seen as an exemplar which led to the Gwynedd court propagandists' creation of Maelgwn Gwynedd as the archetypal Venedotian ancestral figure.

Taken as a whole, Gildas's depiction of British kings reveals that they were extremely powerful individuals. Warfare was their principal activity, though some judicial functions are also implied. Kingship of itself was not illegitimate; nor was the concept of a royal kindred: bad contemporary kings could follow their good forebears, either as the result of the slaying of their predecessor or through dynastic succession.[127] As an institution, then, kingship was established within western Brittonic society: power, no doubt, remained personal, but the

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[123] *Annales Cambriae*, 551 [547].

[124] *PT*, 11.36.

[125] *DEB*, 33.1. Jackson, '*Varia* II', 35: that Gildas's *insula* meant 'Britain' need not mean later generations could not reinterpret *insula* for more current reasons.

[126] N. A. Jones, 'Hengerdd in the Age of the Princes', in Woolf (ed.), *Beyond the Gododdin*, pp. 41-80, at 55-6.

[127] See T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Dynastic Succession in Early Medieval Wales', in R. A. Griffiths and P. R. Schofield (eds.), *Wales and the Welsh in the Middle Ages: essays presented to J. Beverley Smith* (Cardiff, 2011), 70–88.

concept of kingship was firmly rooted within the lexicon of power amongst the Britons of the West. Before exploring further the origins and identities of such kingships, we should say a few words on the entities that kings ruled.

<u>Kingdoms</u>

Gildas seldom referred to the polities ruled by his five kings or their predecessors. However, in reference to the tyrants destroyed by Maglocunus, Gildas, as might be expected, classified their individual territories as *regnum*, 'kingdom'.[128] Elsewhere, Gildas referred to the 'kingdom of heaven' (*regni caelestis*).[129] On a broader scale, Gildas used *patria* when referring to Britain. In describing areas within the *patria*, Gildas used *regio* (pl. *regiones*), 'region', 'country'.[130] This was a broad descriptive term, without precise political meaning in terms of its relationship to the political authority of kings.

On the other hand, the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* and the tenth-century *Annales Cambriae* preferred *regiones* when describing Brittonic political units; indeed, the author of *Historia Brittonum* was, for our purposes, decidedly unhelpful in his categorisation of Brittonic political units, being disinclined to differentiate between larger and smaller political units on the basis of terminology.[131] Regardless of their geographic size or political power, all 'kingdoms' were *regiones* rather than *regna* – from the hegemonic polities such as Gwynedd to lesser entities such as Ergyng all were equal. In contrast, the author of *Historia Brittonum* termed contemporary Anglo-Saxon kingdoms *regna*; for example *regnum*

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[128] *DEB*, 33.1-2.

[129] *DEB*, 32.2.

[130] *DEB*, 19.4.

[131] *HB*, §35: *regio Povisorum*; §37, *regio Guined*; §41, *regio Gleguissing*; *regio Guunness*; §47, *regio Guorthigirniaun*, *regio Demetorum*; §48, *regio Buelt*; §62, *regio Manau Guotodin*; §63, *regio Elmet*; §70, *regio Cinlipiuc*, *regio Guent*; *regio Ercing*; §74, *regio Cereticiaun*. Also, *AC*, 645: *Demeticae regionis*; 822: *regionem Poyvis*.

Merciorum and *regnum Nordorum*.[132] On occasion, however, Anglo-Saxon kingdoms could be conceptualised also as *regiones*.[133] These terminological differences between British and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in *Historia Brittonum* may have been due, in part, to the author of *Historia Brittonum* taking up the language of his sources, with the Anglian and Saxon material referring to *regna* rather than *regiones*.[134]

Regiones should probably be seen as the term favoured by the Britons. However, the author of *Historia Brittonum* sought to explain the use of *regiones* for British kingdoms, and did so through an analysis of Britain's political development. In the chapters discussing 'ancient history', the author describes the kingdoms of Scythia and of the Romans and Latins as *regna*.[135] Britain at the time of the arrival of Julius Caesar was also a *regnum*; it remained a *regnum* until the time of Vortigern, in the post-Roman period.[136] The intention here, perhaps, was to convey a message similar to that emphasised by Gildas, that is, the island of Britain was an integral whole unaffected by the Roman 'conquest'. The island of the Britons, therefore, was a unified *regnum* under the authority of a single British *rex*: in the pre-Roman past, Belinus, and in the post-Roman period, Vortigern. That this circumstance altered with the Saxon *adventus* was central to Brittonic historiographical writing in the early middle ages; this event should be seen as central to the definition of unified Britain as a *regnum* and the component British kingdoms as *regiones*. That is, the ruin and fragmentation of the British *regnum* which typified Vortigern's reign left only individual *regiones*, irrespective of their size and strength. Of course, this to a large extent was a classification based on and justified by observation of contemporary circumstances: the Britons were split into multiple,

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[132] *HB*, §61, §66.

[133] *HB*, §37, *regio Canturguoralen*; §67, *regio Huich*.

[134] *HB*, §65. For Bede's use of *regio*, see below, p. 304.

[135] *HB*, §15, §10.

[136] *HB*, §20, §37.

competing kingdoms, sharing the island with numerous other Saxon, Anglian, and Jutish political units, not to mention the Picts and Scots in the far north.

Identities in the West

From the above discussion of western British kings, it is evident that continuation of identities occurred in the upland regions. In general terms, the pattern of political development, as discussed briefly above, is dominated by the territorialisation of *civitas* identities. We have already noted the territorialisation of Dumnonian identity. Elsewhere, the Deceangli of north-eastern Wales were territorialised as Tegeingl, the lands between the rivers Dee and Clwyd. There were, however, variations within this process: for example, Silurian identity had been articulated in an epigraphic context at their capital, *Venta Silurum*.[137] Yet despite the apparent strength of Silurian cantonal identity, it did not persist far, if at all, into the post-Roman period; rather, the name of the urban centre, *Venta* took on regional significance as *regio Guent*, Gwent. Territorialisation had taken place, though the development was akin to that of the other urbanised *civitates*. Similar processes of territorialisation were at work regardless of whether or not kingdoms were related to Roman period administrative units. For example, political units bearing names derived from ancestral figures such as Rhufoniog, Meirionnydd, Dunoding, Eifionydd, and Ceredigion were territorial rather than population units.[138] Of course, Ordovician identity persisted into the fifth century, prior to the emergence of Venedotia in the sixth century.

Why ancestral identities should have persisted amongst the Britons of the west to a greater extent than elsewhere in former *Britannia Prima* is a matter of some interest: indeed, the preservation of these identities, even in territorial form, might be connected to the

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[137] *RIB*, 311.

[138] M. Richards, 'Early Welsh Territorial Suffixes', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 95 (1965), 205-12.

strength of kingship in the upland regions. If this was the case, however, it would suggest a somewhat different pattern of political development than amongst the barbarian peoples of Europe. In western Britain the relationship between ancestral identities and kingship appears to have been more complex as some early medieval political units led by kings had names derived from Roman period *civitas* communities. Paradoxically, while the Roman provincial 'system' worked to perpetuate and consolidate cantonal identities through interaction with the state, retention of ancestral names into the fifth and sixth centuries appears to have occurred most successfully in areas that lacked Roman civil infrastructure.

How, then, do we integrate kingship into our understanding of early medieval group identities amongst the Britons of the West: what were its origins and how did the creation of kingships affect the perpetuation of ancestral identities amongst the peoples of far western Britain? Use of the ancestral landscape by emergent rulers may prove the key to understanding this issue. Hillforts were an important part of the settlement pattern in the uplands, both in the late and post-Roman periods. It is sometimes stated that hillforts, while 'characteristic' of the early medieval period, were 'inhabited for defensive reasons' only.[139] Indeed, an extreme interpretation of Roman period hillfort occupation views these settlements as defensive works manned by the enemies of Rome.[140] Thus, it has been suggested that western Britain lay outside imperial control from the third century onwards.[141] However, two points militate against this: first, Rome maintained a military presence in fourth-century Wales, with Cardiff, Brecon, Caer Rhun, Caer Gybi and Caernarfon all occupied in this period.[142] Second, Roman material culture appears at a number of hillforts, suggesting these sites were integrated in wider networks of supply and exchange. In fact, it is suggested below

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[139] Davies, *Wales*, p. 89.

[140] Simpson, *Britons and the Roman Army*, pp. 150-6.

[141] Dumville, 'The Idea of Government', p. 179.

[142] Arnold and Davies, *REMW*, pp. 33-4.

that communities in the upland regions were very much part of the Roman world in the late antique period.

Late occupation is attested at Dinorben, near Abergele (Denbighshire), in the territory of the Deceangli. The substantial hoard of one hundred and eighty-four third- and fourth-century coins indicates occupation between 270 and 370.[143] Other finds indicative of high-status include metalwork and ceramics, ranging from cooking vessels and crockery, essential commodities for feasting. The pottery derived from non-local sources.[144] Wider links were seemingly essential to the prosperity of the kindred based at Dinorben. Of major interest is the large timber roundhouse which was constructed to the northern end of the hillfort. In all probability, this functioned as the dwelling of the 'headman' and his family. Various cultural influences are evident from Dinorben, suggesting that the 'headman' and his kindred possessed syncretic identities based on their status within the locality which was buttressed through contacts with the wider world. Two further sites in Denbighshire provide evidence of fourth-century occupation. The first, Moel Fenlli (associated with the Cadelling dynasty of Powys in *Historia Brittonum*) has a substantial hoard of 1500 Constantian coins and some ceramics.[145] The second, Pen y Corddyn, has also produced third- and fourth-century coinage. Of greater importance was the discovery of a military or official-status belt-buckle and plate of fourth century date,[146] indicative of high-status occupation, a matter returned to below.

In north-western Wales, a number of hillforts demonstrate occupation in the late Roman period. Din Silwy (Bwrdd Arthur) on Anglesey, for instance, has produced a range of coinage from the Houses of Constantine and Valentinian. Other high-status activity is

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[143] W. Gardner and H. N. Savory, *Dinorben. A Hill-Fort Occupied in Early Iron Age and Roman Times* (Cardiff, 1964), pp. 116-24.

[144] Gardner and H. N. Savory, *Dinorben*, pp. 137, 198-202.

[145] Arnold and Davies, *REMW*, p. 89.

[146] Arnold and Davies, *REMW*, p. 89.

suggested by the find of a fourth-century *mortarium* rim.[147] In Caernarfonshire, Tre'r Ceiri

has produced pottery and coinage dated to the fourth century.[148] The community at Tre'r

Ceiri has been referred to as low-status, but the construction of the hillfort around an earlier

Bronze Age cairn would seem to suggest otherwise. Its occupants might not have held

supremacy over a wide territory but its lofty position is certainly emblematic of a certain

status and exclusivity. Elsewhere, Dinas Emrys in central Snowdonia has produced mortaria,

pottery and, most unusually, glass, of late Roman date.[149] There can be little doubt that this

was a high-status community; indeed, as we shall see, Dinas Emrys was an important site in

the post-Roman period.

In southwest Wales, the coastal fort at Coygan Camp (Carmarthenshire) appears to

have been important for a short while in the late third century.[150] Coinage indicates that re-

occupation began around 260 before coming to an end around 300. It has been interpreted as

home to a late third-century counterfeiter.[151] Re-occupation is testified to by the presence of

later, Mediterranean pottery.[152] A prominent ancestral site within the Demetian *civitas* was

Castell Henllys.[153] Here, the inner area of the hillfort was not, strictly speaking, occupied

throughout the Roman period; the Iron Age defended enclosure was abandoned and an

unenclosed settlement occupied through the second to fourth centuries located outside, but in

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[147] Gardner and Savory, *Dinorben*, p. 216; Arnold and Davies, *REMW*, p. 88.

[148] Arnold and Davies, *REMW*, p. 88.

[149] Gardner and Savory, *Dinorben*, p. 216.

[150] G. J. Wainwright, *Coygan Camp. A Prehistoric, Romano-British and Dark Age Settlement in Carmarthenshire* (Cardiff, 1967), pp. 45-73.

[151] Wainwright, *Coygan Camp*, pp. 116-26.

[152] Wainwright, *Coygan Camp*, p. 157.

[153] H. Mytum, 'Castell Henllys', *Current Archaeology* 14 (1999), 164-71.

reference to, the hillfort embankment. However, at the end of the period a ditch was cut across the main access route, indicating reoccupation of the hillfort interior.[154]

The intermittent manner in which hillforts were occupied and re-occupied in this period suggests these sites maintained a certain aura amongst local communities as important features of the ancestral landscape. For some scholars, indeed, hillforts are considered to be the highland equivalent to the Roman villa, at least in terms of their high-status.[155] However, the socio-economic basis of local rulership differed between the highland and lowland zones. According to Hingley, for example, patterns of power in the highland zone were conceived and maintained in a manner similar, if not identical, to those of the pre-Roman Iron Age: hillforts were occupied by a local potentate who acted as 'headman' or 'chief' to the dependent settlements, with emphasis placed on the creation of reciprocal links with kindred and clients and the perpetuation of traditional forms and expressions of social power, such as the accumulation and redistribution of cattle.[156] Thus, the symbolic importance of hillforts can be seen as reinforcing the status and identity of local kindreds. Communal activities focussed on the hillfort, which perhaps acted as assembly sites, underpinned these social networks. Feasting and cult practices were important activities central to the creation of reciprocal bonds within small-scale societies. The presence of pottery, cooking instruments and the 'wand' from Dinorben suggests such social behaviour existed to reinforce the bonds between 'headman' and members of the local kindred.

This activity, however, did not, lead directly to kingship: hillforts had existed in Wales prior to the Roman conquest and the evidence for kingship in Iron Age far western Britain is slight or, indeed, non-existent. Instead, the intervention of the Roman authorities

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[154] Mytum, 'Castell Henllys', 168.

[155] Hingley, *RSRB*, pp. 147-8; Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 40.

[156] Hingley, *RSRB*, pp. 144-8; Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 40-4.

was essential for the accumulation of power at hillforts to transform into kingship. Contacts with the wider provincial world were central to this process, with personal and regional identity predicated on the status derived from the possession and re-distribution of non-local material within regional communities. This created or reinforced distinctions within local society which increased the significance of authoritarian leadership across the late fourth, fifth and sixth centuries.

Intervention by imperial authorities in the diocese's peripheral regions where direct state control was slight created circumstances similar to those on the imperial frontiers, with the upland communities of western Britain becoming (versions of) 'frontier peoples' whose internal political constitution was affected by diplomatic contact with the Roman state. In the fourth century, this diplomatic contact came from within Britain, though later, in the fifth and sixth centuries, it stemmed from continental and eastern Roman influence. This is not to suggest that the occupants of peripheral hillforts were non-citizens; these were provincial 'Romans' like the communities further east. However, multiple strategies would have been necessary to secure the western shores against piratical raids and other disturbances; thus the sanctioning of violence by the Roman state amongst the early highland 'kings' was perhaps an important aspect of the political development in the region.

That quasi-official status was granted to some of these groups is indicated by the high-status metalwork from Pen y Corddyn. This certainly has official or military associations and might be seen as a gift from the provincial government, legitimising in an imperial context the 'headman's' status in the locality. The rarity, indeed, of such an object must have given the recipient sufficient local prestige, much as imperial gifts marked out barbarian leaders beyond the *limes*. Militarised *romanitas* provided the exemplar for the local peoples, mediated through sites such as Caernarfon whose garrison were no doubt integrated

into local society through marriage and kinship ties: indeed, by the late Roman period, this unit were known or regarded themselves simply as the *Segontienses*, the 'men of Segontium'. Such contact augmented local authority; although hillforts are viewed as elite residences rather than military sites, the 'headman' and his kindred might have performed a quasi-military function without the site itself designed to withstand a siege or other engagement. From its later occupational levels, Dinorben, for instance, has produced items with military associations, including three projectile heads and a spear ferrule similar to those found at the Roman forts of *Segontium* and Brecon Gaer.[157]

Emphasis on martial *romanitas* in the far west ensured new configurations of power in the fifth and sixth centuries. Apart from the militarisation of local groups, this scenario quite possibly led to the settlement of Irish *foederati* amongst the Demetae and perhaps in Brecon which, eventually, played a role in the emergence of kingship in western Britain. Targeted diplomacy had created the circumstances under which militarised leadership was the most desired form of power amongst the peoples of far western Britain. It is small wonder, then, that the aspirations of early medieval rulers were reflected in their penchant for military-style Roman titles, as exemplified by reference to Maglos the *magistratus*[158] and the Castell Dwyran stone's use of the term *proctictor*.[159]

The seeds of early medieval Brittonic kingship, then, were sown in the conditions of the late fourth and early fifth centuries; there was no re-emergence of 'Celtic' kingship for no such 'institution' existed prior to the conquest. Although a different form of society existed in far western Britain than in the eastern *civitates* of *Britannia Prima* it took the intervention of the Roman authorities to create kings, as happened elsewhere in Britain and beyond. This,

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[157] Gardner and Savory, *Dinorben*, p. 157.

[158] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, MR8.

[159] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, CM3.

moreover, was a continuing process into the fifth and sixth centuries, exemplified by the continued occupation or reoccupation of a number of hillforts where interaction with the Roman world is evident.

Contact is typified by the cultural material which appears at hillforts and other coastal sites in the fifth and sixth centuries; in fact, this material has proven to be the main evidence for early medieval occupation at western British sites. This material is formed of several groups of ceramics and glassware imported from Gaul and the Mediterranean, recently categorised by Campbell.[160] The Mediterranean material can be divided into three subsections: Phocaean Red Slipware (PRS) produced at Phocaea (western Turkey) between the fourth and seventh centuries; African Red Slipware (ARS), produced in the Carthage region of North Africa from the second to seventh centuries; and Late Roman Amphorae (LRA), divided into two main British classes Bi and Bii, were produced, respectively, in the Argolid region of the Peloponnese and the Sardis area of western Turkey.[161] This material reached Britain from *c*. 475 to 550.

In Wales early medieval occupation is attested at a number of sites, some of which saw occupation in the later Roman period. In the north, high-status activity is attested at Degannwy, which stands above the river Conwy. Here were found fragments of Byzantine amphorae and late Roman pottery.[162] Inland was the site of Dinas Emrys, which has fourth-century evidence of high-status activity. The site, which consists of a low stone wall that runs round the boundary of the hillfort, commands one of the main routes through Snowdonia.[163]

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[160] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, pp. 14-73.

[161] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, pp. 14-22.

[162] N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds.), *Early Medieval Settlements in Wales AD 400-1100* (Bangor and Cardiff, 1988), pp. 50-3.

[163] Edwards and Lane (eds.), *Early Medieval Settlements*, pp. 54-5.

Finds of imported material include fragments of DSP, E ware and late Roman amphorae.[164] Both Degannwy and Dinas Emrys are relatively small sites, suited for the occupation of a king and his retinue. In southern Wales the most famous site is Dinas Powys, which demonstrates evidence for occupation between the fifth and seventh centuries.[165] Here, two important phases have been identified, the first consisted of a slight bank (Bank 2) enclosing a triangular area (0.25 acres) which contained two buildings, one sub-rectangular and the other square; the second phase witnessed the incorporation of the smaller bank into massive banks and ditches, two outside its line and one inside, the latter stone-faced with a timber palisade.[166] The occupants clearly possessed wide contacts, as testified to by the presence of Frankish glass, Anglo-Saxon metalwork, and sherds of ARS (18), PRS (40), LRA (184) DSP (46) and E ware (73).[167]

The range of Mediterranean imports found at sites within Wales is, however, dwarfed by the amount of material recovered from the coastal site of Tintagel (Cornwall), which served as the nodal point for contact with the Mediterranean and Gaul.[168] The site has produced a minimum of thirty-two vessels of ARS, imported between *c.* 530 and 600.[169] LRA, both Bi and Bii, PRS and glass wares have been recovered from Tintagel in amounts far outweighing those from other sites in western Britain.[170] Tintagel was likely to have been a royal residence for the kings of Dumnonia, whose control of these imports increased their power within the locality.

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[164] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, pp. 27, 11, 19.

[165] Edwards and Lane (eds.), *Early Medieval Settlements*, pp. 76-8.

[166] L. Alcock, *Dinas Powys. An Iron Age, Dark Age and Early Medieval Settlement in Glamorgan* (Cardiff, 1963), pp. 28-9; A. Seaman, 'Dinas Powys in Context: Settlement and Society in Post-Roman Wales', *SC* 47 (2013), 1-23.

[167] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, Tab. 7.. p. 87.

[168] Dark, *Britain*, pp. 153-6.

[169] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, p. 18.

[170] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, pp. 19, 22-3, 58, 135-6.

Reoccupation of hillforts and the use of Mediterranean imports was not, however, confined to the western regions, even if this was the area of principal consumption. Indeed, this activity is observable within the former Durotrigan *civitas* at the hillforts of Cadbury Congresbury and South Cadbury. Cadbury Congresbury, situated near Yatton (Somerset), has produced imported glass and pottery and appears to have contained a roundhouse of sixth-century date.[171] However, it is South Cadbury which has garnered most interest in the past, principally due to its association with 'King Arthur'. This aside, South Cadbury was an important site in the fifth and sixth centuries.[172] The site is located in close proximity to Ilchester and may represent a transferal of power to the hillfort. Whatever the case, the site saw substantial renovation in phase 11, which began no earlier than 400 as dated by a coin of the emperor Honorius (395-423). Activity here was signalled by the construction of Bank E, atop of which was a timber palisade.[173] Elite activity was indicated with the presence of Mediterranean imports, including PRS, ARS and LRA.[174] The clustering of this material in area L and the presence of four large and deep postholes suggests that a hall was located in this area.[175]

The presence of this material at sites in western Britain is suggestive of a range of possible diplomatic and trade relations between Britain and the eastern Roman empire. Perhaps Britain's reputation as the 'tin isle' resulted in ambitious traders collecting precious cargoes and setting off to the northern seas in order to claim this lucrative market. This may have some truth to it, particularly as Exeter had imported ceramics from the eastern Mediterranean in the later fourth century. Another, perhaps more plausible, explanation is

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[171] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, pp. 118-19.

[172] Dark, *Britain*, p. 145.

[173] L. Alcock, *South Cadbury, Somerset. The Early Medieval Archaeology* (Cardiff, 1995), pp. 14-18.

[174] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, pp. 14, 31; Alcock, *South Cadbury*, pp. 84-90.

[175] Alcock, *South Cadbury*, p. 36-7.

that the the Roman emperors, particularly Justinian and his successors during the reconquest of the West attempted to contact and maintain relations with Christian, citizen communities in order to demonstrate their reach to contemporary rulers in the continental lands of the former western provinces, who had deputations at Constantinople. If this were the case, then perhaps the eastern emperors would declaim how they ruled the furthest reaches of the empire, even having recovered distant Britannia, regardless of the truth of this matter. For local Brittonic rulers, however, the circumstances which surrounded this contact would have been completely different. Here, they could represent themselves as having contacts with the still powerful Roman empire; however, it is possible that this would have been interpreted not as a partnership, albeit an unequal one. While the emperor might be acknowledged as a father-figure, it is doubtful whether this recognition would have been viewed as a submission of the acknowledgement of loss of autonomy: put simply, the Roman emperor was too distant to involve himself directly in British affairs, and the local kings knew that. Thus although possession of imported material worked to accentuate the cultural affinities of the importers, strengthening their rule through the control of prestige material and displaying their *romanitas*, it would, in all probability have been interpreted as the basis of an working relationship between emperor and king, similar to that found elsewhere in contemporary Europe.

Reuse of hillforts speaks directly to two concerns which are detectable in the pages of Gildas: concern with the ancestral past and the bond between ruler and retinue. Dealing with the latter first, it is clear that the reciprocal bonds required to engender loyalty between king and warrior were sustained by the type of activity taking place at hillforts. The amphorae and other pottery imported from the Mediterranean would have contained wine and oils, used for feasting whose very variety meant that the consumption of this material was indicative of high-status and proximity to the individual or kindred who controlled such trade. Thus, the

elites who dwelt at or controlled such sites were able to use this material in the construction and perpetuation of their power; indeed, it was perhaps one of the key mechanisms which reinforced royal authority.

More importantly, this type of interaction between king and and retinue, according to ethnogenesis theory, was vital to the creation of new identities based on service to a ruler. To a certain extent, however, these activities and the legitimisation accrued through the demonstration of contacts with the eastern Roman empire were continuations or reactivations of patterns of power which had existed in the fourth century, though the authority of the hillfort dwellers in that period stemmed largely from their intra-provincial contacts. However, these rulers, though recognising the legitimising effect of Roman interaction perhaps considered themselves (unequal) partners with the emperor rather than subordinates or members of a now far-off and fractured empire.

On the other hand, reoccupation of these sites suggests that ruling elites, possibly newly emergent, were anxious to harness the power of the ancestral past. This was a common strategy amongst early medieval rulers and is detectable elsewhere in Britain, notably at Yeavering in Bernicia. Thus sites such as South Cadbury, which may have retained some aura in the Roman period, subsequently became of great value for groups or individuals who desired to stress their legitimacy and antiquity within the locality; indeed, occupation of the site and recognition of this position from the surrounding population, whether forcibly extracted or otherwise, would have concentrated power in the hands of those whom ruled from these impressive features of the ancestral landscape. The very act of reoccupation would have been, in certain senses, a ritual act which confirmed the right to rule, sanctioned by the ability of the ruling group to demand labour and resources for the construction of the hillforts' defences and internal structures.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The origins of kingship amongst the Britons of the far west should not then be associated with deep-seated ideas about rulership existing amongst local communities; indeed, it is doubtful that pre-Roman Wales had kings. Nor should the 'headman' model of hillfort reoccupation be seen as leading directly to the emergence of kingship. Rather, the intervention of Roman authorities created and bolstered the power of specific individuals and kindreds, as did the presence of non-local material cultures. Militarised *romanitas* was fundamental to the creation of a form of leadership which emphasised connection to the Roman state. With the added influence of Irish settlers, perhaps hired as federates, the military ideal of leadership was the most potent and this created the circumstances under which Roman military titles were used in the articulation and definition of power within the locality.

The upland areas also witnessed a greater degree of continuation, or at least claims of continuation than elsewhere in former Britannia Prima. Such claims by the rulers of early medieval territories demonstrates that invocation of ancestral identities was key to legitimating claims over lands and peoples; however, it might also suggest that while recognition of such an identity was prerequisite to royal power, such claims were now monopolised by a small elite, one which supped imported wine from continental glassware. Further east, the continuation of ancestral identities and the growth of kingship appears to have been a slower process. Here, late Roman landlords may have turned themselves, however briefly, into warlords without establishing dynastic groups or kingdoms. Fragmentation of *civitates* appears to have been common and this affected the longevity of ancestral identities, particularly in the Dobunnic and Durotrigan civitates. Nonetheless,

kingship did emerge, eventually, in these regions, perhaps in emulation of polities located further west, with kingdoms named from the territorialisation of urban sites.

Nonetheless, it is important to stress the differences between east and west. The emergence of kingship amongst the peoples of the 'highland zone' perhaps should, indeed, be seen as a consequence of the different type of interaction which existed between these groups and the Roman state across the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries. In the upland regions civilian notions of *romanitas* were perhaps less entrenched and systems of social reproduction less dependent on participation in Roman state governance, as was the case amongst the urban and villa elite. Indeed, interaction rather than dependence characterised this relationship; thus while the collapse of state power within Roman Britain might have had short-term consequences for the occupants of Dinorben or Pen y Corddyn, the recreation of links with the (eastern) Roman Empire augmented the power of these 'frontier kings'. Social status might have been more easily attained in western Britain than elsewhere in the former western empire, but conditions here were not a return to tribalism. The power of rulership in western Britain was articulated terms common to the late antique world, even if some elements of the lexicon of power were unique to locality. Kingship in western Britain, then, was the product and legacy of local interaction with the Roman state, with both ancestral identities and militarised *romanitas* being central to the articulation of power in a local context.

Chapter 7: The North British Zone

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the transformation of identities within the north British zone – that is, the broad stretch of territory extending from the Mersey and Humber in the south to the Firths of Clyde and Forth in the north. Processes of identity and kingship formation, termed by some 'ethnogenesis', were widespread in late antiquity, both on and within the frontiers of the western provinces. Indeed, the 'fall of the Roman empire' is regarded as crucial in creating the circumstances in which alternative sources of political legitimisation, often in the form of 'barbarian' identities, rose to prominence alongside the well-established paradigms of Roman authoritative political expression. In the Roman period the north British zone encompassed both *provincia* and *barbaricum*, therefore our discussion is divided into three interrelated sections: the first, examines the transformation of identities amongst the *civitates* of *Britannia Secunda*; the second, discusses the emergence of a distinctive identity amongst the northern *limitanei*; and the third analyses the creation of frontier *gentes* within the intramural zone.

To aid our assessment of group identities in the north British zone we shall examine the material known as the early Welsh poetry – that is, the 'historical' poems of Taliesin and the *Gododdin* of Aneirin.[1] *Llyfr Taliesin*, 'the Book of Taliesin' (Nat. Lib. Wales MS Peniarth 2) is a vast anthology containing sixty-two poems on various subject and genres, prophetic, elegiac, praise, which reflect the various personas of Taliesin.[2] Written in a single

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[1] Edition: *Poems of Taliesin*; *Canu Aneirin*, ed. I. Williams (Cardiff, 1938). Translation: 'The Gododdin' in *The Triumph Tree. Scotland's Earliest Poetry, AD 550-1350* , ed. T. Clancy (Edinburgh, 1998). See also: *The Goddodin*, ed. Jackson; *The Goddodin of Aneirin: Text and Context from Dark Age North Britain*, ed. J. T. Koch (Cardiff, 1997).

[2] *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, ed. and trans. M Haycock (Aberystwyth, 2007), pp. 5-6.

hand using a regular textura script, the manuscript dates to the first half of the fourteenth century.[3] Ifor Williams argued that twelve of these poems were authentic compositions of the sixth-century poet, Taliesin, eleven of which were in praise or commemoration of the northern rulers Urien Rheged, his son Owain and their sometime ally, Gwallawg. Williams reached this conclusion on the basis of the following points: first, the 'voice' of the northern poems was decidedly different to the personality of the 'legendary' poet; and second, *Historia Brittonum* confirmed, in broad chronological and geographical terms, the existence and location of Taliesin and Aneirin, and the northern rulers, Urien and Gwallawg.[4] Williams furthermore postulated a ninth-century exemplar for the historical poems in *Llyfr Taliesin*, arguing that twelfth- and thirteenth-century scribes miscopied a text written in Insular script, dominant in Wales between the seventh and eleventh centuries.[5] Following the suggestion of John Morris-Jones, Williams argued that where a twelfth- or thirteenth-century copy of an older Welsh poem showed confusion between **n** and **r,** the exemplar must date to the ninth century as the first stroke of a tenth- or eleventh-century **r** descended sufficiently far below the line to distinguish it from **n**.[6]

This methodology has come under severe criticism, particularly from David Dumville, who has refuted the external validation supposedly offered by the 'northern section' of *Historia Brittonum*.[7] Furthermore, Dumville has demonstrated that the habits of individual copyists varied when it came to the style of particular letters; hence an exemplar written in Insular script need be no earlier than the eleventh century.[8] Graham Isaac

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[3] D. Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff and Aberystwyth, 2000), p. 79.

[4] *Poems of Taliesin*, ed. Williams, pp. xv-xix.

[5] I. Williams, *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry*, ed. R. Bromwich (Cardiff, 1974), p. 46.

[6] *Beginnings*, p. 157.

[7] D. N. Dumville, 'On the North British section of the *Historia Brittonum*', *WHR* 8 (1976-7), 345-54.

[8] D. N. Dumville, 'Palaeographical Considerations in the Dating of Early Welsh Verse', *BBCS* 27 (1976-8), 246-51, at 248.

meanwhile has argued *Gweith Gwen Ystrad* is the product of court culture of the period 1050-1150, which attempted to create a 'northern heroic age' honouring the heroes found in Welsh tradition.[9] Isaac's argument, in part, stems from his rebuttal of Koch's proposition that *Gweith Gwen Ystrad* is a genuine composition of the late sixth century, recounting Urien's defence of *Catraeth* against the Gododdin.[10] A consensus on the authenticity of the eleven northern poems thus does not yet exist, although our understanding will be aided greatly on the completion of Marged Haycock's Taliesin 'trilogy'.

The *Gododdin* (Cardiff MS 1) has seen far greater scrutiny over recent decades. In part, this is due to the manuscript, dated to the second half of the thirteenth century,[11] being compiled by two hands, known as A and B. Scribe A first began the process of copying the *Gododdin*, covering twenty-three pages of the manuscript with eighty-eight stanzas; leaving page 24 blank, scribe A continued to copy the four *Gorchanau*, extended verses celebrating individual members of the Gododdin retinue, until coming to a halt on eleventh line of page 30. Following this, scribe B, perhaps mistakenly believing he had reached the end of A's work, copied a variant *Gododdin* beginning on page 23, filling page 24 and the recommencing on page 30. Text A, the more elaborate version, was copied from a twelfth-century exemplar; while B utilised a pre-twelfth century exemplar in Old Welsh orthography.[12] It was originally thought that scribe B, presented with his pre-twelfth century text, only modernised parts during copying thus giving Text B an inconsistent look in terms of its orthography. Graham Isaac has suggested, however, that inconsistencies in the extent to which scribe B modernised his text were the result of this second scribe having before him two manuscripts of differing orthography, classified as BI and BII with the latter

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[9] G. R. Isaac, 'Gweith Gwen Ystrad and the Heroic Age of the Sixth Century', *CMCS* 36 (1998), 61-70, at 66-8.

[10] *Gododdin of Aneirin*, pp. xxvi-xxx.

[11] Huws, *Manuscripts*, p. 75.

[12] Ibid.

acknowledged to be the oldest, orthographically speaking.[13] Nevertheless, Isaac is reluctant to view the poem, or rather the exemplars which contributed to the Book of Taliesin, as having northern origins. Instead, he views this material has having been weaved together in Wales, probably Gwynedd, to support the claims of the Gwynedd kings to be the paramount rulers within Wales.

As with the 'historical' Taliesin poems, Ifor Williams argued for the genuineness of the *Gododdin*.[14] The text itself ascribes the work to Aneirin of *Historia Brittonum* fame and this was accepted by Williams, who assigned the exemplar of B a ninth-century date. Kenneth Jackson opted for a slightly broader range of dates, suggesting the exemplar was produced sometime between the eighth century and end of the eleventh century.[15] As noted above, Isaac suggested that B was a conflated text formed of two exemplars of differing orthography. More recently, John Koch has adopted this stemma, accepting the genuine northern origins of the *Gododdin*, and thus attempting to reconstruct the oldest strata of the text. For Koch, indeed, BII represents an early recension identified as the sixth- or seventh-century '*Ur*-text'.[16] However, there has not been universal acceptance of Williams' or Koch's attribution of a sixth or seventh century date.[17] As Jackson's broad chronology admitted, Dumville's palaeographical arguments apply also to the *Gododdin*. Oliver Padel has been similarly sceptical of the poem's genuineness and the extent to which any such text might be recreated.[18]

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[13] G. Isaac, '*Canu Aneirin* Awdl LI', *Journal of Celtic Linguistics* 2 (1993), 65-91, at. 87-9.

[14] Williams, *Beginnings*, p. 46.

[15] *The Gododdin*, ed. Jackson, pp. 42-3.

[16] *Gododdin of Aneirin*, ed. Koch, pp. lxvi-lxxx, lxxxix-cx.

[17] O. J. Padel, 'A New Study of the *Gododdin*', *CMCS* 35 (Summer 1998), 45-55, at 48-55.

[18] O. J. Padel, 'Aneirin and Taliesin: Sceptical Speculation', in Woolf (ed.), *Beyond the Gododdin*, pp. 115-152, at pp. 117-129, 130-7.

Other issues centre on the supposed transmission of the poem from the north to Wales. Multiple theories have been put forth and there is not the space to cover them here, but most argue the poem passed through Alclud, where the Strathcarron stanza was incorporated, before the ancestor of A passed to Wales while B remained in the north.[19] For Koch, the major compulsion to record the vernacular material concerned with the north British kingdoms was the importance of the confrontation between the Britons, as a whole, and the; indeed, contemporaries might have viewed this as a life and death struggle while those of later generations would no doubt have seen the events surrounding the Northumbrian hegemony as pivotal in the history of the Britons.[20] Koch would see the line of transmission as fairly secure, with the campaigns of Cadwallon of Gwynedd against the Deiri and Bernicii in the mid-seventh century opening up contacts between Wales and the North which facilitated the exchange of poetic and other material.[21] That such interaction did occur is of course a possibility, though other routes of transmission were also open, particularly through the Church. Although the northern poetic material is not ecclesiastical in tone or content, local foundations could have served as repositories for such information, particular if they were royal foundations linked closely to the prosperity of particular dynasties or kingships.

Nonetheless, for some scholars a major stumbling block is the supposed 'theme' of the poem which appears to recount a battle between the Gododdin and the Angles of Deifr at *Catraeth*, a site identified as Catterick (Yorkshire). Problematically, this was also one of Urien's holdings.[22] Padel finds that later Welsh poets might have utilised Bede, with 'the importance of Catraeth in Welsh poetry' arising 'from its importance in Northumbria during

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[19] *Gododdin of Aneirin*, ed. Koch, pp. lxxxix-xciv; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 369-70.

[20] J. T. Koch, 'Why Was Welsh Literature First Written Down?', in H. Fulton (ed.), *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 15-31, at, pp. 20-8.

[21] *Gododdin of Aneirin*, ed. Koch, pp. lxxxix-xciv.

[22] D. N. Dumville, 'Early Welsh Poetry: Problems of Historicity', in B. F. Roberts (ed.), *Early Welsh Poetry: Studies in the Book of Aneirin* (Aberystwyth, 1988), pp. 1-16, at p. 3.

the seventh and eighth centuries'.[23] This is a rather uneasy explanation: although Catterick was noted by Bede as a place of mass baptism and a royal residence there is little to be found in the pages of the Ecclesiastical History that would compel a later poet to select this site as a bone of contention between the Deiri and Gododdin; the 'historical' content of the *Gododdin* is returned to below. Perhaps, indeed, the absence of the Gododdin from later Welsh traditions concerning or passed down from the North might be the best indication that *Y Gododdin* was composed in its original form at the court of *Din Eidyn*. In particular, the absence of numerous heroes praised in the poem from the genealogies of the Men of the North remains an oddity which doubters cannot explain if the poem was composed in, say, the ninth century to please descendants of these men. True, the kings of Gwynedd claimed this status, but it would seem likely that this was done in order to appropriate the poem and the Gododdin rather than a nostalgic and sentimental remembrance of fallen ancestors. Without suggesting, then, that the northern poems have remained unchanged through the centuries, it is argued here that the compositions praising Urien in the Book of Taliesin and the *Gododdin* can be used to aid reconstructions of northern political geography and the perception of group identities.[24]

Britannia Secunda

Northern Britain was heavily militarised. Roman military installations dominated the landscape, particularly the legionary fortress at York and the Pennine forts. Roman power was most visible at the Wall, the linear frontier constructed under the auspices of the emperor Hadrian begun in the 120s which spanned the Tyne-Solway gap, extending down the

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[23] Padel, 'Aneirin and Taliesin', p. 140.

[24] Cf. T. O. Clancy, 'The Kingdoms of the North: Poetry, Places, Politics', in Woolf (ed.), *Beyond Gododdin*, pp. 153-77, at 154-7.

Cumberland coast.[25] The Wall was porous, controlling the movement of goods and peoples between *provincia* and *barbaricum*.[26] However, the Wall also functioned as a symbolic manifestation of imperial authority in the 'debateable lands of central Britain', impressing upon the local populace the power and magnificence of the empire in a province visited rarely by the emperor.[27]

Amongst scholars of Roman Britain, the civilian groups located below the Wall have seen more limited attention than the military forces stationed along the Wall or in its hinterland, whether in the late or early Roman period.[28] Their identities have been regarded as static until the end of the Roman period, when after an indeterminate period of time, according to the model proposed by Dark, the Brigantian, Carvetian and Parisian *civitates* developed into kingdoms.[29] West of the Pennines, the rural populace appear to have rejected Roman material culture; here settlement was typified by the roundhouse to the exclusion of villas and other substantial non-military Roman buildings.[30] Alienation of local communities was probably the result of their displacement caused by warfare, the construction of the Wall and other military installations and the influx of Roman soldiers. The reluctance or inability of the local populace to embrace *romanitas* and the overwhelming dominance of the Roman military might be seen as negating the emergence of local elites who strove to incorporate themselves within the provincial framework, as happened elsewhere in Britain and across the empire. However, this was problematic for the empire, which required the active participation

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[25] Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 39-45.

[26] Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, p. 33; Collins, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 26-30.

[27] R. Hingley and R. Hartis, 'Contextualizing Hadrian's Wall: The Wall as Debatable Lands', in Heckster and Kaiser (eds.) *Frontiers in the Roman World*, pp. 79-95, at pp. 85-90.

[28] Breeze, 'Civil Government in the North', 63; M. McCarthy, 'Social Dynamics on the Northern Frontier of Roman Britain', *OJA* 24 (2005), 47-71.

[29] Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 71-4; *idem*, *Britain and the End*, pp. 193-202.

[30] Hingley, 'Rural settlement', pp. 338-44; Harding, *Northern Britain*, pp. 169-70.

of local groups in governance and administration; the creation of the Carvetian *civitas* no later than the third century perhaps in part a response to this lack of social hierarchy.

East of the Pennines, a different picture emerges. Again, there was an extensive military population, exemplified by the legionary fortress at York, the centre of imperial government in the north. This region was also the heartland of Brigantian power, with the Vale of York and the Wolds being areas of high agricultural fertility.[31] *Isurium Brigantum*, Aldborough, was the Brigantian capital. This proximity to imperial authority – indeed, York had been at the centre of imperial politics during the reigns of Septimius Severus, Constantius I and Constantine I – must have had a significant effect on perceptions of power amongst the surrounding populace. Across this eastern zone, around thirty structures have been identified as 'villas' or 'substantial Roman buildings'.[32] Villas, for instance, were located at Castle Dykes, in the vicinity of Aldborough, and Dalton Parlours in York's hinterlands. In the North York Moors, villas were located at Rudston, Harpham, Beadlam and Hovington, all within relatively easy reach of Malton, an important Roman fort situated on the River Derwent in Parisian territory. To be certain, there were no villas of comparable splendour to those found at Chedworth and Woodchester; nonetheless, the culture of the villa elite in the Brigantian and Parisian *civitates* was broadly comparable to that found amongst their peers in *Britannia Prima*. Again, mosaics were an important marker of social prestige, with products of the Petuarian 'school' (340-50) at Brough-on-Humber clustered within that *civitas* and perhaps extending to villas on the southern shore of the Humber estuary at Winterton and Horkstow.[33]

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[31] Harding, *Northern Britain*, pp. 162-69.

[32] Sargent, 'The North-South Divide Revisited', 219-26; Ordnance Survey, *Map of Roman Britain*, 6th edn.

[33] Jones and Mattingly, *Atlas*, Map 6:41, p. 223; D. S. Neal and S. R. Cosh, *Roman Mosaics of Britain*, Volume I: Northern Britain (London, 2002), pp. 23, 299-378.

Differences between east and west in culture and settlement pattern manifested themselves again in the post-Roman era. Despite the positing of the *civitas* to kingdom model, northern *civitas* identities did not persist far, if at all, into the early medieval period where Brittonic poetic and historical sources talk of Elmet, Rheged and Deifr, all of which were considered territorial units. The last of these, Deifr, was considered by Bede to be an Anglian 'people', the Deiri, *gens Deirorum*.[34] The Deiri are treated as the poorer cousins to the dominant Bernician dynasty in the academic literature dealing with the ethnogenesis of the Northumbrian *gens*.[35] Yet the Deiri perhaps formed prior to the Bernicii. Deifr is a name of Brythonic origin, perhaps derived from *derventio*, 'river of oak trees'.[36] It may have emerged amongst vernacular speakers in the late antique period as a territorial designation replacing the Parisian *civitas*. However, linear progression seems simplistic: Deifr might have developed from complex interaction between regional elites, military and civilian, in late antique eastern Yorkshire and Humberside. This was a region of economic prosperity, with the Huntcliff and Crambeck potteries distributing their wares across the frontier zone.[37] As noted above, several villas occur in this area sited in close proximity to the major Roman fort at Malton, on the crossing of the river Derwent. It should perhaps occasion no surprise that the *uilla regalis* of the Deiran king, Edwin, stood on the river Derwent,[38] perhaps in the locale of the former Roman fort or at Stamford Bridge. Edwin, indeed, was depicted by Bede as travelling round his kingdom with the insignias of Roman power.[39]

The Deiri certainly appear to have utilised the political landscape of the northern frontier zone and contemporary material culture in the articulation of quasi-imperial power.

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[34] Bede, *HE*, iii.1.

[35] E,g. Wood treats Edwin as a Bernician ruler, *Fragments of History*, p. 115.

[36] J. G. F. Hind, '*Elmet* and *Deira*-Forest Names in Yorkshire?', *BBCS* 28 (1980), 541-52, at 547-52.

[37] Bidwell and Croom, 'The supply and use of pottery', pp. 20-36.

[38] Bede, *HE*, ii.9.

[39] Bede, *HE*, ii.16.

Another Roman site utilised by the Deiri was York, the former provincial capital.[40] Although the evidence for continuity at fifth-century York is ambiguous,[41] the consumption of suckling pigs, a romanised dietary practice, in the former *basilica* may suggest the presence of an elite who attempted to assert their status through conspicuous consumption within the settings of the former Roman fortress.[42] If this activity represent continuity, of sorts, with the late Roman situation, then Deifr/the Deiri, rather than a successor to the Parisian *civitas* was perhaps the result of an amalgamation of elite identities, military and civilian. An indication that areas of eastern Yorkshire had been drawn into the same socio-political zone is suggested by the distribution of high-status metalwork, belt-fittings and zoomorphic buckles which have been found, for instance, at Barmby Moor, Barton-le-Willows and Beadlam (north Yorkshire) and Driffield and Market Weighton (east Yorkshire).[43] Malton has also produced a number of buckles/belt fittings.[44] As this material is not confined to one *civitas*, those who participated in this form of display were presumably participants in a network of power based not upon singular identification as a member of a cantonal elite but through interaction with other high-status members of a broader socio-military community. It was this interaction, perhaps, which facilitated the emergence of a distinct late antique 'Deiran' identity, later stimulated by the arrival of 'Germanic' peoples from continental Europe and Scandinavia.

As for the other kingdoms noted above, Elmet is considered to have emerged from the former Brigantian *civitas*. It was located in the Yorkshire West Riding, where place-names

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[40] Bede, *HE*, ii.14; C. Spail and N. Toop, 'Before *Eoforwic*: New Light on York in the 6th-7th Centuries', *MA* 52 (2008), 1-25, at 18-20.

[41] R. A Hall, 'Recent Research into Early Medieval York and its Hinterland', in Petts and Turner (eds.), *Early Medieval Northumbria*, pp. 71-84, at pp. 71-5.

[42] J. Gerrard, 'Rethinking the Small Pig Horizon at York Minster', *OJA* 26 (2007), 303-7, at 305-6.

[43] J. C. N. Coulston, 'Military equipment of the 'long' 4th century on Hadrian's Wall' in Collins and Allason-Jones (eds.), *Finds from the Frontier*, pp. 50-63, Appendix 6.1, nos. 2, 3, 4 and 24, 34.

[44] Ibid., nos. 30-33.

such as Sherburn-in-Elmet and Barwick-in-Elmet testify to its former existence.[45] The relationship between Elmetian identity and former Brigantian *civitas* identity is uncertain; there is a slight concordance with the Brigantian goddess inscriptions which are found in this general area.[46] Again, 'Elmet' may have emerged in the late antique period as a local territorial designation within Brigantia, later becoming politicised as an early medieval *regio*.[47] An inscription from Llanaelhaearn, in the shadow of Tre'r Ceiri hillfort, northwest Wales, commemorates *Aliortvs Elmetiaco*, Aliortus the Elmetian.[48] Elmet also appears in historical sources. *Historia Brittonum* notes that Edwin, *occupavit Elmet et expulit Certic regem illius regionis*, 'seized Elmet and expelled Ceretic, king of that *regio*'.[49] *Annales Cambriae* for the year 616 notes the death of one Ceretic,[50] though it states Edwin's reign began the following year. The northern material in *Annales Cambriae* is concentrated between 573 (*Bellum Armterid*) aand 627 when Rhun ab Urien is said to have baptised Edwin, king of the Deiri.[51] Yet given the involvement of the Britons of Wales with the Northumbrians might be seen to extend to the death of Cadwalad ap Cadwallon in 682. However, the early strata of this material is thought unreliable and not considered to be part of an earlier British chronicle concerned with events in both northern and southern Britain which ran from 614-777. There is, then, an odd circumstance which omits several northern entries which are not assigned to the putative British Chronicle for 614-777, possibly due to

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[45] See, R. G. Gruffudd, 'In Search of Elmet', *SC* 28 (1994), 63-79, at 63-8; A. Breeze, 'The Kingdom and Name of Elmet', *NH* 39 (2002), 151-71, at 159-65.

[46] *RIB*, 623, 627, 628, 629.

[47] That is, it was more than a mere forest name, *contra* D. Rollason, *Northumbria,500-1100. Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 86-7.

[48] Edwards, *Corpus*, III, CN20.

[49] *HB*, §63.

[50] *Annales Cambriae* (A), 616: *Ceretic obit*.

[51] *Annales Cambriae* (A), 573, 597, 616, 619, 620, 627.

the influence of the Chronicle of Ireland on the compilation of *Annales Cambriae*.[52]

Nonetheless, the entry at 616 in *Annales Cambriae* concerned with the death of 'Ceretic' might have been composed relatively soon after his death as part of the British Chronicle which covered the years 614-777.

Returning to Cerdic and Elmet, Bede also knew of a *rex Brettonum* of this name, responsible for the murder of Edwin's cousin Hereric.[53] Both *Annales Cambriae* and Bede fail to mention Elmet in connection with Ceretic; however, Bede was largely uninterested in British political geography and in the early entries of *Annales Cambriae* rarely notes territorial designations or patronymics. The *Gododdin* refers to one Madauc Eluet, and this has been seen as a territorial epithet.[54] Elmet may also feature in poetry ascribed to Taliesin which honour a north British ruler, Gwallawg:[55]

> *Aeninat yn ygnat ac eluet*[56]

> Who was honoured as judge over Elmet

Debate surrounds this corrupted line and the possible relationship between Gwallawg and Elmet,[57] though it is accepted tentatively here. Vernacular *ynad* perhaps corresponds to Latin *iudex*.[58] Could this represent an inherited Roman title granted to a local war-lord in the service of Rome; or perhaps the manifestation of an individual's aspirations of legitimacy? Whatever the case, Gwallawg is also *wledic*, 'king', 'prince', 'ruler', and *udd* or *glyw*,

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[52] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 354-9.

[53] Bede, *HE*, iv.23.

[54] *Gododdin of Aneirin*, ed. Koch, pp. xxxi-xxxii (BI.22).

[55] *PT*, XI, XII.

[56] *PT*, xii.21. Trans. Clancy, *TT*, p. 92.

[57] Gruffudd, 'Elmet', 70.

[58] Gildas, *DEB*, 27.

'lord'.[59] Accepting Elmet as Gwallawg's *patria*, the poem mentions the defence of Llan Lleenawc,[60] 'the enclosure of Lleenawc', perhaps a reference to a religious foundation marking the resting place of Gwallawg's father, Lleenawc.[61] This must have been an area of significance within Elmet. It has been identified as Staynlennock in Cumbria,[62] but this seems too far distant from Elmet to be the case. A more suitable location might be the Deiran monastery *in silua Elmete*,[63] which, although burnt by Cadwallon, may have started as an Elmetian royal foundation. Such a foundation would be comparable to sites such as Llangadwaladr (Anglesey), which marks the resting place of Cadwaladr ap Cadwallon, king of Gwynedd in the mid seventh century. The Northumbrians certainly took over Brittonic religious foundations so this should at least be seen as a possibility. Reference to a royal *llan*, suggests concern with the Christian status of Elmet and the dynastic continuity of its rulers. Within or in close proximity to Elmet was another polity, *regio Loidis*, a name preserved in modern Leeds and Ledsham. It contained a Deiran royal settlement, *uilla regalis*, belonging to Edwin known to Bede as *Campodonum*, also destroyed by Cadwallon.[64] *Campodonum* and *Loidis* are both names of Brythonic derivation which suggests these may have been going political concerns taken over, by one means or another, by the Deirans. *Campodonum* was in fact the name of the former Roman site near Dewsbury, suggestive that links with the ancestral Roman past were important to the rulers of *Loidis*.

Elsewhere in western Yorkshire and eastern Lancashire, Brittonic political geography is poorly delineated. Here perhaps existed Brittonic polities subject to either the rulers of the Deiri or Bernicii during the sixth and seventh centuries, such as the small kingdom of Craven,

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[59] *PT*, 2.2; 3.7; 7.7.

[60] *PT*, 11.5.

[61] Bartrum *HG*, 9.

[62] Rowland, *EWSP*, p. 101.

[63] Bede, *HE*, ii.14. And also comparable with the foundations gifted to Wilfrid: see below.

[64] Bede, *HE*, ii.14.

again in the old Yorkshire West Riding.[65] Bede talks little of western Britain, though he

mentions Æthelfrith's expulsion of Britons or their tributary status as a means of defining the

relative positions of Angles and Britons within contemporary Northumbria.[66] However, it is

equally possible that he wanted to mask the cooperation which once perhaps existed between

British and Anglian rulers in the reigns of Æthelfrith and Edwin. Although unrecorded, it

would seem probable in comparison with later powerful Anglian or Saxon kings that their

armies contained British contingents.[67] Woolf, indeed, has connected Bede's Cadwallon and

Cadwallon *lyr* of the Harleian genealogies, suggesting the latter was a powerful northern ruler

who rebelled against Edwin, subsequently drawn into *Historia Brittonum* as king of

Gwynedd.[68] This view has not found universal favour.[69] However, *Vita Wilfridi*, the life of

the Northumbrian bishop Wilfrid (d. 709) indicates British *regiones* persisted west of the

Pennines into the latter stages of the seventh century. Here, the life's author notes:

> *loca sancta in diversis regionibus quae clerus Bryttannus aciem gladii hostilis*
>
> *manu gentis nostrae fugiens deseruit.*[70]

> the consecrated places in various *regiones* which the British clergy had deserted
>
> when fleeing the hostile sword wielded by the warriors of our own people.

These *loca sancta – Iuxta Rippel et Ingaedyne, regione Dunutinga, Incaetlaevum –* identified

as 'round Ribble and Yeadon, Dent, and Catlow' are located in western Northumbria.[71]

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[65] P. N. Wood, 'On the Little British Kingdom of Craven', *NH* 32 (1996), 1-20, at 3-5.

[66] Bede, *HE*, I,34; F. H. Clark, 'Thinking About Western Northumbria', in Petts and Turner (eds.), *Early Medieval Northumbria*, pp. 113-128, at pp. 116-18.

[67] For instance Penda's armies contained British contingents, *HB*, §64-5.

[68] A. Woolf, 'Caedualla *rex Brettonum* and the Passing of the Old North', *NH* 41 (2004), 5-24, at 21.

[69] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 390, n. 55.

[70] Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi*, 17.

[71] G. R. J. Jones, 'Some Donations to Bishop Wilfrid in Northern England', *NH* 31 (1995), 22-38, at 29-36; Clark, 'Western Northumbria', pp. 118-20.

Granted to Wilfrid by the Northumbrian kings, Ecgfrith and Aelfwini, around 680, the expulsion of the British clergy was probably a recent event. It would seem unlikely, given the role of kin-groups in the consolidation of religious and secular power that British clergy persisted in the north without the backing of local Brittonic elites. The expulsion of Brittonic elites from western Northumbria – perhaps previously existing as Northumbrian client rulers – might be seen as the necessary advent to Ecgfrith's reign, rather than the result of ethnic tension, with Ecgfrith needing lands for redistribution. In fact, *regio Dunutinga* might be the 'regio of the descendants of Dunawd', a Brittonic name known from the northern genealogies and poetry.[72] The term *regio* was often used by Bede to denote smaller political units within larger provinces.[73] It was also the term favoured by Brittonic sources to denote a kingdom.[74] While Stephanus might be using *regio* loosely, it is tempting to see in cases such as *regio Loidis* and *regio Dunutinga* examples of earlier British polities surviving as Northumbrian districts.

Under the Northumbrian hegemony, it seems the British population occupied a subordinate position; a further passage from *Vita Wilfridi* relates how a boy, Eodwald, whom Wilfrid had brought back to life was carried off by his mother until they were found hiding *sub aliis Bryttonum*.[75] The bishop's *praefectus*, Hocca, was able to retrieve the boy without incident, suggesting that the Britons were under the bishop's authority. Here, ethnicity implies subordination and vulnerability, not high status.[76] This should caution us against assuming that ethnic identities were utilised solely as manifestations of political power by their bearer: they could equally be imposed on others for reasons of dominance and control.

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[72] Bartrum, *HG*, 11. Another Dunawd was a 'son' of Cunedda who gave his name to Dunoding, the area around Porthmadog in northwest Wales.

[73] J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 86-7, 113.

[74] See discussion above, p. 277.

[75] Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi*, §18.

[76] *Contra* Geary, 'Situational construct'.

The presence of low-status Brittonic Northumbrian communities in Yorkshire, Lancashire and County Durham is well-attested. Place-names such as Walworth, County Durham, Adwalton near Leeds and Walshford, just north of Wetherby contain the Old English place-name element *wealh*, (p. *wēalas*) 'foreigner', 'Latin-speaker, 'Roman', 'slave',[77] indicative of an Anglian view of these British (Latin-speaking?) communities; however, the connotations of *wealh*-'slave' were slow developments that were continuing throughout the seventh century.[78] However, it was possible for *wēalas* noblemen to serve the king in seventh-century Wessex which might suggest a similar situation existed in Northumbria; indeed, given the wide hegemonies sustained by rulers such as Edwin and Oswald, this is perhaps a likely circumstance. Certainly if British dynasties were only driven from places such as *regio Dunutinga* in the later seventh century there remains the possibility that fighting men from these *regiones* would take service with the most powerful of northern rulers. On the other hand, the place-name element *Cumbre*, from Cymry, such as Upper and Lower Cumberworth, Yorkshire West Riding, suggests that some Brittonic communities were able to retain their sense of identity despite the dominance of Anglian naming practices – that these are preserved within Elmet and *regio Loidis* is perhaps not coincidental.

For a number of scholars, the most famous kingdom located primarily within former *Britannia Secunda* was Rheged. Rheged appears in neither *Historia Brittonum* nor *Annales Cambriae*, though the former displays an interest in Urien and his descendants.[79] Its fame derives entirely from the historical Taliesin poems, nine of which honour Urien and his son Owain.[80] It has been argued that Rheged was the successor-state to the Carvetian *civitas*,

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[77] M. L. Faull, 'The Semantic Development of Old English *wealh*', *Leeds Studies in English* 8 (1975), 20-44, at 32-4.

[78] Cf. The Laws of Ine; Faull, 'Semantic Development', 20-22.

[79] *HB*, §63

[80] *PT*, nos. ii-x.

centred on Carlisle.[81] Others have identified Rheged as Dumfries and Galloway or Upper Tweeddale, though these explanations are less convincing.[82] Carlisle seems to have been of importance in the early medieval period. Whether this results from continuity or claims of continuity with the Roman past is uncertain. Archaeological evidence indicates fifth- and sixth-century activity at Carlisle in the form of strip-house-type structure which later had large post-pits similar to those at Birdoswald driven through the cobble foundations.[83] It also appears in historical sources: the anonymous Life of Cuthbert refers to Carlisle as *civitas Luel*.[84] In his *Vita Sancti Cuthberti* Bede gave the correct name as *Lugubalia*.[85] *Historia Brittonum* names it *Cair Ligualid*.[86] In *prouincia Berniciorum*, Carlisle was a royal *urbs* governed by a *praepositus*.[87] It was here that Cuthbert while touring the town's Roman remains with Ecgfrith's wife, Eormenburg, received a vision of the king's impending destruction at the battle of Dún Nechtáin (A.D. 685).

Carlisle's identification with Rheged and Urien derives from lines in twelfth-century poetry.[88] As we shall see, the poems make reference to several regions associated with Urien; however, these do not include *Luguvallum*. Rather, Woolf has suggested that Urien's kingdom was preserved in the medieval archdeaconry of Richmond which extended across

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[81] Williams, *Poems of Taliesin*, ed. Williams, pp. xli; Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 72-3, 128-9; *idem*, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire*, p. 199; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 11-12.

[82] T. Clarkson, *Men of the North: The Britons of Southern Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2010), pp. 73-4; M. McCarthy, 'Rheged: an early historic kingdom near the Solway', *PSAS* 132 (2002), 357-81; *idem*, 'The Kingdom of Rheged: A Landscape Perspective', *NH* 68 (2011), 9-22; *idem*, '*Rerigonium*: a lost 'city' of the Novantae', *PSAS* 134 (2004), 119-29.

[83] M. McCarthy, *Roman Carlisle and the Lands of the Solway* (Stroud, 2002), pp. 138-9.

[84] Anon, *Vita Cuthberti*, ed. Colgrave, 4.9.

[85] Bede, *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, ed. Colgrave, §27.

[86] *HB*, §66a.

[87] In Ecgfrith's reign, Waga: Anon. *Vita Cuthberti*, ed. Colgrave 4.8.

[88] But see M. Haycock, 'Early Welsh Poets Look North', in Woolf (ed.), *Beyond Gododdin*, pp. 9-40, at pp. 10-11.

the Pennines and included several localities associated with Urien in the poetry.[89] Notable

amongst the localities is *Llwyfenydd*, referred to in five separate compositions.[90] Urien was

teithiawc llwyfenyd, 'the rightful owner of Llwyfenydd', suggesting it was site with a *uilla*

regis similar to those identified amongst the Deiri and Bernicii.[91] According to Morris-Jones,

Llwyfenydd and *Llwyfein*, site of a battle recorded in the poem *Gweith Argoed Llwyfein*, are

derivatives of the British stem **Leimanio*, 'elm', and were linked by him with the Roman

road heading south from Catterick known as Leeming Lane.[92] This would certainly have been

a valuable area to control; the fertile strip of land here an essential resource to any early

medieval ruler. However, 'elm' names may have been common in early medieval north

Britain. Most commentators favour the area around the River Lyvennet in Westmorland,

which runs north from the fells east of Shap and joins the Eden near Temple Sowerby.[93]

Although no early medieval activity has been identified there, the Roman fort of

Bravoniacum, Kirkby Thore, situated north-east of the Lyvennet on the Stainmore Pass,

heading south towards Catterick, has produced type E and F penannular brooches, the latter

considered to be of late-fifth century date.[94] While too early to be associated with Urien, this

activity suggests Roman sites remained important parts of the ancestral landscape. Elsewhere

Urien is referred to as *vryen vd yr echwyd*, 'Urien lord of Erechwyd'[95] and *uryen yr echwyd*,

'Urien of Yrechwyd':[96]

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[89] A. Woolf, 'Episcopal Sees and the Construction of the Kingdom of Northumbria', unpublished paper, pp. 1-8, at pp. 5-6.

[90] *Poems of Taliesin*, ed. Williams, pp. xliv-xlv; *PT*, 4.21, 7.19, 8.27, 9.10, 10.8.

[91] *PT*, 8.27. For the Northumbrian heartlands, see Rollason, *Northumbria*, pp. 20-56.

[92] J. Morris-Jones, 'Taliesin', *Y Cymmrodor* 28 (1918), 71.

[93] A. H. A. Hogg, 'Llwyfenydd', *Antiquity* 20 (1946), 210-11; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 11.

[94] Collins, 'Brooch use', App. 7.3., nos. 24-25.

[95] *PT*, 3.1; 6.13.

[96] *PT*, 3.1, .18, .19; 6.13.

Tan yn tei kyn dyd rac vd yr echwyd / Yr echwyd teccaf ae dynyon haelaf[97]

Before the day, houses in flames before the lord of Yrechwyd / most fair

Yrechwyd and its most generous men

Close association of *Yrechwydd* and its *dynyon haelaf*, 'most generous men' are perhaps an indication that this poem was composed for *Yrechwydd*'s host, the favour of whom the poet hoped to gain. Andrew Breeze has argued that *Yrechwydd*, 'before freshwater', equates to the fenland area north of the River Wharfe surrounding and including York.[98] While this may be an area where salt water was absent, it is difficult to comprehend why the poet would refer to an area of extensive marshland as 'fresh'. Other options include Lakeland and Swaledale.[99] If Urien's status as *diffreidawc yn aeron*, 'defender in Aeron'[100] refers to Airedale in Yorkshire rather than Ayr in southwest Scotland, according to the *Gododdin* the territory of Cynri, Cynon and Cynrain, then his central Pennine kingdom achieves greater solidity.[101] Here, then, we may find a ruler controlling the central hinterland area of the former northern frontier zone, stretching across former *civitates* and incorporating the locations of former Roman military installations. We should perhaps understand Urien's kingdom, like Deifr, as a composite which included elements of identities and territorial claims drawn from both the Roman military past and the *civitas* groupings – that is, these new 'kingdoms' were not changed names on the political map but fundamentally new creations of the fifth and sixth centuries.

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[97] *PT*, 3.18-19.

[98] A. Breeze, 'Yrechwydd and the River Ribble', *NH* 47 (2010), 319-28, at 322-3.

[99] *Poems of Taliesin*, ed. Williams, pp. xlii-xliii.

[100] *PT*, 8.22.

[101] *PT*, 7.12. The river/region name 'Aeron' also appears Wales: for instance, Aberaeron (Cardiganshire). See H. W. Owen and R. Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales* (Llandysul, 2007), p. 1.

Other poems name Urien as *lyw katraeth*, 'the lord of *Catraeth*'.[102] Urien's connection to *Catraeth* remains one of the most contentious issues surrounding the authenticity of the northern poetry.[103] *Catraeth* is known from the *Gododdin* as the site of a battle between the Gododdin and the Deiri, thought to have taken place at *Cataranctocum*, Catterick (Yorkshire) where the Roman road connecting York with the Wall crosses the River Swale. This is a matter of some debate, with some scholars placing *Catraeth* at Richmond or elsewhere in the north.[104] Phil Dunshea, while arguing for an early context for the *Gododdin* has argued for the relative unimportance of *Catraeth* in the orthographically earliest stanzas of the poem.[105] If, however, *Catraeth* is Catterick, what seems probable is that rather than simply referring to the site of modern Catterick, *Catraeth* developed from a town name to become a description of a wider territory. Indeed, this appears to have been the case with small towns in western Britain, such as Ergyng. However, it has been questioned how Urien could be the lord of a site known as a Deiran *uilla regalis*, particularly as there are indications of an early Anglian presence at Catterick.[106] Here, according to Bede, Edwin used to stay frequently and on one occasion oversaw his subjects' mass baptism at the hands of Paulinus.[107] Under Edwin, mass baptisms took place also at *Campodonum* in *regio Loidis*, York in *prouincia Deirorum* and *Ad Gefrin* in *prouincia Berniciorum*: Catterick, as a *uilla regalis*, may have been the 'caput' of a former centre of Brittonic political power.[108] Indeed, although it is maintained that Catterick was an early Anglian site, we have been warned

[102] *PT*, 8.9.

[103] Dumville, 'problems of historicity', p. 3.

[104] T. J. Clarkson, 'Richmond and Catraeth', *CMCS* 26 (Winter 1993), 15-20; *idem*, *Men of the North*, pp. 103-9.

[105] P. Dunshea, 'The Meaning of *Catraeth*: A Revised Early Context for *Y Gododdin*', in Woolf (ed.), *Beyond Gododdin*, pp. 81-114, at pp. 84-97.

[106] L. Alcock, *Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests in Northern Britain 550-850* (Edinburgh, 2003), 140-4; P. R. Wilson *et al.*, 'Early Anglian Catterick and *Catraeth*', *MA* 40 (1996), 1-61, at 50-4.

[107] Bede, *HE*, ii.14.

[108] Woolf, 'Episcopal Sees', p. 6.

against drawing too hard a distinction between political authority, ethnic identity and material culture.[109] John Koch has indeed seen a high degree of Brittonic-Anglian interaction at Catterick, in prticular between the Deiri and Bernicii. Koch in fact suggested that the baptism of Edwin which took place at Catterick and in *Annales Cambriae* and *Historia Brittonum* was assigned to the hand of Rhun ab Urien is testament to the close bond between the two dynasties; indeed, after Urien's death and the rise of the Bernicii, this interaction continued but now between the descendants of Urien and those of Æthelfrith: *Historia Brittonum* records the marriage between Oswy son of Æthelfrith and Rieinmelth the great-granddaughter of Urien Rheged.[110] This is confirmed by the presence of one *Raegnmaeld* in the ninth-century Durham *Liber Vitae* which recorded the marriages and other details of the Northumbrians kings. There was then an intimate relationship between the dynasties of Rheged and Northumbria.

What seems assured from the Taliesin poems is that *Catraeth* was an intimate part of Urien's territories and its men were his personal following:

> *Arwyre gwyr katraeth gan dyd. am wledic gweithuudic gwarthegyd*[111]

> The Men of Catraeth arise with the day, surrounding a battle-victorious, cattle-raiding ruler

This poem, *Gweith Gwen Ystrad*, has been interpreted as the opposing view recounted in the *Gododdin*.[112] As a brief aside, however, we might pursue a different account which explains both the Gododdin attack and Urien's lordship of *Catraeth*. Rather than an attack which Urien had to fend off, the Gododdin raid might have been a response to a power vacuum

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[109] *Gododdin of Aneirin*, ed. Koch, pp. xviii-xxiii.

[110] *HB*, §57, 63.

[111] *PT*, 2.1-2.

[112] *Gododdin of Aneirin*, ed. Koch, pp. xxvi-xxx.

which occurred in the aftermath of Urien's death at the siege of Lindisfarne.[113] Contextualising the battle in these terms also explains the absence of the Bernicii from the B-text, not because they were the allies of the Gododdin (though this is possible), or because the attack took place prior to the 540s,[114] but because the Bernicii had been temporarily hamstrung following the slaying of their king, *Fflamddwyn* – identified as Theodoric of the Bernicii – by Owain ab Urien and the siege of their heartlands.[115] The Bernicii could only have played a subsidiary role at this stage.[116]

It seems possible, then, that the altered circumstances created by Urien's death coincided with a period of Bernician vulnerability which the Gododdin sought to exploit through large-scale raiding into Urien's former territory. That is, it was not an attempt to prevent the meeting of the Bernicii and Deiri but perhaps an opportunistic strike which sought to take advantage of Cynfarching weakness. However, this may have coincided with a northward expansion on the part of the Deiri. Perhaps once Urien's allies or subjects, the Deiri now sought to fill the vacuum created by his death and control this important route-way connecting their lands with areas further north. With both Gododdin and the Deiri taking interest in this debateable land, a clash of powers was bound to occur. If the *Gododdin* commemorates a series of encounters, the most famous of which was or became *Catraeth*, then such a scenario occurring immediately prior to the rise of Æthelfrith seems plausible.[117]

Urien's kingdom, then, should be placed firmly into the central area of the former frontier province. The association seen between Urien and Rheged appears to be important,

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[113] *PT*, 10.11; *HB*, §63.

[114] Dumville, 'problems of historicity', p. 3.

[115] *PT*, 2.9.

[116] Bernician kings were, sometimes, cautious on their assumption of power; see Eanfrith's fateful dealings with Cadwallon: Bede, *HE*, iii.1.

[117] I intend to develop this hypothesis in the future.

hence reference to him as *vryen reget*, 'Urien Rheged'.[118] Rheged might be seen as the

general term for Urien's kingdom, with the other names locales within it. The poem indeed

suggests a symbiotic relationship between ruler and territory, in which protection of the land

was fundamental to Urien's rulership:

> *Reget diffreidyat clot ior agor gwlat*[119]

> Defender of Rheged, renowned lord, anchor of the country

Rheged was a *gwlad*, 'country', 'land', 'kingdom', and Urien was the *glyw reget*, 'the lord of

Rheged'.[120] Indeed, the combination of the terms *diffreidyat* and *gwlat* suggests Urien's

function was to protect his *patria*:

> *Annogyat kat diffreidyat gwlat / gwlat diffreidyat kat annogyat*[121]

> Inciter of battle, defender of the country / country's defender, battle's inciter

Urien was both the defender of his *gwlad* and the inciter of battle, actions which protected

Rheged and expanded his authority. Urien's protective role is further apparent during *Gweith*

Gwen Ystrad where Urien is described as *tut achles*, 'refuge of the people' against

Fflamddwyn and his demands for hostages.[122] Rheged was both land, *gwlad*, and people, *tut*,

these units of adherence being synonymous, linked to Urien through a biological relationship:

> *gwaladyr gwaed gwenwlat Vryen*[123]

> Urien, prince of the blood of the fair-kingdom

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[118] *PT*, 3.13.

[119] *PT*, 3.14.

[120] *PT*, 2.27.

[121] *PT*, 4.15-16.

[122] *PT*, 2.9.

[123] *PT*, 8.49.

Urien's blood was shared with his kingdom, with the lord, his land and its people being one entity. Regionalism defined Urien's identity – himself and Owain, his son, were the representatives of both land and people, though the territories were the primary units of adherence.

It appears evident, nonetheless, that the wider significance of Urien's leadership was understood by the poet, who described Urien as *y vd prydein*, 'the lord of Britain'.[124] This may perhaps represent a claim of pre-eminence rather than a statement of ethnicity, similar to the Anglo-Saxon term *Bretwalda*.[125] It is clear, indeed, that Urien's enemies included fellow Britons, principally Alclud:

> *kat yn ryt alclut kat ymynuer*[126]

> a battle in the ford of Alclud, battle for the torque

This contest is depicted as a struggle between two rival powers, grasping for the *mynfer*, 'torque', the impression given that Rheged and Alclud operated within overlapping zones of influence; though we cannot infer these two kingships bordered on one another directly. Another battle is thought to have occurred at *Breguoin*, identified as *Bremenium*, the former Roman fort of High Rochester on Dere Street in the central lowlands.[127] Urien's opponents remain obscure; however, *Bremenium* was located amongst the Votadini by Ptolemy and Urien is described in the same poem as confronting Gododdin.[128] Urien is also known from

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[124] *PT*, 7.31.

[125] S. Keynes, 'Rædwald the Bretwalda', in C. B. Kendell and P. S. Wells (eds.), *Voyage to the Other World: The Legacy of Sutton Hoo* (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 103-23, at pp. 107-11.

[126] *PT*, 7.21-5.

[127] K. H. Jackson, 'Arthur's battle of Breguoin', *Antiquity* 23 (1949), 48-9.

[128] *PT*, 7.16.

Yspeil Taliesin to have raided Manau, around the Forth.[129] Possible reference to a

confrontation against Powys also occurs.[130]

Despite evidence for intra-Brittonic conflict and the centrality of regionalism to

Urien's identity as *glyw reget*, the poet did wish to proclaim the ethnic associations of his

patron through an expression of kinship:

:

> *Maranhedawc diffreidawc aeron / mawr y wyn y anyant ac eilon / mawr dyfal ial*
>
> *am y alon / mawr gwrnerth ystlyned y vrython*[131]

> the wealthy defender of Aeron / great his delight in poets and deer / great is the
>
> fierceness of his attack against his enemy / great and powerful is his kinship to the
>
> Brython.

The poet indicates clearly that 'great and powerful kinship to the Brython' was an important

element of Urien's identity. He was a Briton, linked to other Britons through kinship.

'Brython' appears only once in association with Urien. It is of interest, then, that within the

northern poetry this label is mentioned primarily in passages where *aeron* occurs, such as

those in the *Gododdin* which refer to Cynon of Aeron.[132] This might be the result of the

rhyme between *aeron* and *vrython*, though it is tempting to wonder whether control of Aeron

conferred some special status of which we are little aware.

Regardless of the connection between Aeron and Brython, Urien's Britishness was

communicated through Christianity; if this were the case then the attempt of the poet in

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[129] *PT*, 5.6.

[130] *PT*, 7.14-16.

[131] *PT*, 8.22-5.

[132] *Gododdin of Aneirin*, ed. Koch, BI.23.

distinguish Urien and his followers on the basis of their faith resembles the attitudes found in Gildas's *De Excidio*.[133] References to Urien as the *enwir rwyf bedyd,* 'leader of the baptised',[134] and as the *haelaf dyn bedyd,* 'most generous man of the baptised'[135] recognise Urien's pre-eminence. But here 'baptised' might stand as a synonym for 'the Britons' and their status as chosen people, contrasting them with the heathen Angles. As the period in which Urien was thought to have operated preceeded the conversion of the two Northumbrian peoples, it might be thought that Christianity as an aspect of *romanitas* was integral to Urien's identity.

Even while Urien and his descendants may have maintained diplomatic relations with both the Deiri and Bernicii, it was still possible for the court propagandists to accentuate hostility towards a rival ethnic group as an integral component of Rheged's Brittonic identity. Indeed, of the eight poems dedicated to Urien, *Gweith Argoed Llwyfein* and *Urien yr echwyd* are concerned solely with actions against 'Anglian' enemies, the *lloegrwys,* 'the men of Lloegyr' – a term which has come to mean the English. In a line which recalls Gildas's hatred of the 'impious easterners', Owain ab Urien is extolled as *dwyrein ffossawt,* 'the affliction of the East'.[136] Urien was also famous for his hostility to the Angles:

> *Gnawt eigyl heb waessaf am teyrn glewaf*[137]

> it is customary for the Angles to be without defence around the most fierce *teyrn*

Anglian defencelessness was *gnawd,* 'customary', 'usual', 'natural', a habitual part of their relationship with Urien, a picture which accords with *Historia Brittonum*. Thus the Taliesin

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[133] See Ch. 4.

[134] *PT*, 2.5

[135] *PT*, 3.1.

[136] Williams, *Poems of Taliesin*, ed. Williams, p. 74.

[137] *PT*, 3.20.

poems identify Urien primarily as a territorial lord and protector of his people who fought

other Brittonic polities for pre-eminence in the north. However, these poems, which further

characterise Urien as a Briton and a Christian, contain a strong element of hostility towards

the *eigyl* and opposition to Anglian/Saxon heathen identities. While warfare was territorial

and dynastic, court rhetoric could accentuate ethnic hostility for political and social reasons.

Regionalism and Britishness, characterised by Christian identity and opposition to the

heathen Angles, thus signified Urien's identity as the paramount ruler of the North British

zone. Harder to discern within Urien's identity or that of his kingdom is the militarised

romanitas which mattered greatly amongst post-Roman peoples, particularly those associated

with or dwelling within former frontier zones. Both Franks and Goths, former frontier *gentes*

employed as federates by the Roman state regarded themselves as the imperial military in the

late antique period. It is, of course, possible that given the lack of reception of Roman culture

within the *civitas* of the Carvetii that *romanitas* was of little value amongst the Britons of the

North. Yet as have seen in a previous chapter, the epigraphic habit, in certain respects,

articulated amongst the northern Britons aspirations of *romanitas*, both in secular and

ecclesiastical contexts.[138] Indeed, the potentcy of Roman military architecture and the

continued use or reoccupation of military sites in the North suggests such considerations were

important to contemporaries. Indeed, Edwin was depicted by Bede as the epitome of the

imperium-wielding king, marching behind a 'Roman' standard. Elsewhere, early

Northumbrian rulers utilised 'imperial' locations on the Wall and in the hinterland.[139] Perhaps

a greater problem derives from our view of Urien and the concepts of power and identity

amongst the northern Britons coming almost completely through the veil of vernacular

poetry. It may be that modernising of these texts by later Welsh scribes has potentially

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[138] See Ch. 5, pp. 234-44.

[139] See below, pp. 321-3.

obscured the contemporary significance of *romanitas*. If an early Latin narrative survived from northern Britain focussed on the Britons, we might find similar descriptions of British rulers which elide with Bede's depiction of the kings of the Deiri and Bernicii as the appropriators of imperial power. This might just be visible, if true, in Urien's association with the former Roman town of *Catraeth*-Catterick. Thus Urien or other northern Brittonic rulers probably concerned themselves with harnessing the power of the imperial past, just as had with their counterparts amongst the western Britons. This was not necessarily an ethnic practice but one designed to buttress the power of individual rulers by assuming thte trappings of Roman power.

The Wall and the Bernicii

It is generally recognised that the northern Wall forts were occupied or reoccupied past the notional end of Roman Britain in 410, with recent interpretations arguing the *limitanei* – that is, the late Roman frontier garrison – maintained a cohesive identity into the fifth century.[140] A recent development on this argument has, indeed, suggested that the Bernicii originated from amongst the *limitanei* and controlled the entire length of the Wall in the late antique and early medieval periods.[141] This suggestion is accepted here, though the notion of Germanic linguistic and cultural dominance over the entire length of the Wall is questioned.

The *limitanei* were the product of late third- and early fourth-century reforms initiated by Diocletian and Constantine.[142] Here, the military were organised into a field army, *comitatenses* and a static frontier garrison, *limitanei*, who received lesser pay and privileges than their elite colleagues. However, the *limitanei* remained professional soldiers charged

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[140] Dark; Collins, 'Military Communities', pp. 27-31.

[141] Orton and Wood, *Fragments of History*, pp. 113-15.

[142] P. Southern and K. R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (London, 1996), pp. 46-52; H. Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe, AD 350-424* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 128-52.

with the defence of the empire: they were not farmer-soldiers depressed to the status of a peasant militia, tilling the earth in exchange for military service.[143] The British *limitanei* were organised under the *Dux Britanniarum*, the 'Duke of the Britains'. Based at York, the *dux* commanded *legio VI*, the units *per lineam valli* and those in the Wall's hinterland.[144] This information appears in *Notitia Dignitatum*, a text preserved in a sixteenth-century manuscript recounting the civilian and military offices of the eastern and western empire, perhaps compiled in the early fifth century.[145] Within the *Notitia*, the Wall garrisons are listed as units of older *alae* type, a number of which, including the Fourth Cohort of Gauls, appear on third-century inscriptions.[146] This has led some scholars to question this information as anachronistic.[147] Others argue, however, that the units of the Wall garrisons of the earlier period were still in place,[148] an interpretation followed here. One major change was unit size, with late Roman garrisons perhaps being somewhere between 30 to 50 per cent smaller than their third-century predecessors, with smaller forts housing around 150 to 250 troopers.[149]

Ethnicity on the Wall

Various identities were on display on the Wall. Amongst these, inscriptions testify to the presence of individuals or groups described as 'Germani', examples of which come from Carrawburgh and Housesteads.[150] Burgundians, Vandals and Alamanni, transferred to Britain

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[143] Isaac, '*limes* and *limitanei*', 146-7.

[144] *Not. Dig.* Occ. XL.

[145] J. C. Mann, 'The Notitia Dignitatum – Dating and Survival', *Britannia* 22 (1991), 215-19.

[146] *RIB*, 1685-88, 1705, 1706, 1710.

[147] M. Kulikowski, 'The "Notitia Dignitatum" as a Historical Source', *Historia* 49 (2000), 358-77, at 358-60, 376-7 with refs.

[148] Collins, *Hadrian's Wall*, p. 39; N. Hodgson, 'The *Notitia Dignitatum* and the Later Roman Garrison of Britain', in V. Maxfield and M. Dobson (eds.), *Roman Frontier Studies 1989* (Exeter, 1991), pp. 84-92, at p. 85.

[149] P. Bidwell, 'Later Roman Barracks', in Maxfield and Dobson (eds.), *Roman Frontier Studies*, pp. 9-15.

[150] *RIB*, 1483, 1525, 1526, 1593, 1597.

in the third and fourth centuries also perhaps served in the northern frontier zone.[151]

However, it must be remembered that even Germanic troopers stationed on the frontier maintained multiple identities: participation in the epigraphic habit indicates their *romanitas*; and honouring of local deities an attachment or engagement with their surroundings.[152] Germanic languages were no doubt were spoken amongst the Wall garrison, perhaps especially along its eastern sector.[153] This has led to claims of a Germanic linguistic and cultural hegemony existing over the Wall and its hinterland.

Yet, on the other hand, inscriptions reveal the presence of 'Celtic-speaking' units stationed on the Wall in the third-century, some of whom appear in the *Notitia*: for instance, the Gallic *Cohors Quartae Lingonum* of *Segedunun*, Wallsend;[154] the Hispanic *Alae primae Asturum* at *Conderco*, Benwell;[155] and *Cohors Quartae Gallorum*, of Vindolanda.[156] Even a British *civitas*, *Cohors Primae Cornoviorum*, was stationed at *Pons Aelius*, Newcastle.[157] The ancestral language of Gallic units and that of the Newcastle Cornovii would certainly have been intelligible to the local population, possibly leading to integration. Even if the nascent late antique Bernicii are regarded as having controlled the entire Wall, there is little reason, in light of the fact that 'Bernicia' or 'Brynaich' is a name of Brythonic derivation to conclude that Celtic-speaking units abandoned their ancestral languages and the Latin of the army in favour of a Germanic dialect during the late Roman period.[158]

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[151] Zosimus, I.68 ; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 29.4.7.

[152] *RIB*, 1102.

[153] Roberts, 'Northumbrian origins', pp. 127-9.

[154] *Not Dig*, Occ. XL. *RIB*, 1299, 1300.

[155] *Not. Dig*. Occ. XL. *RIB*, 1334, 1337, 1338

[156] *Not. Dig*. Occ. XL. *RIB*, 1685-88, 1705, 1706, 1710.

[157] *Not. Dig*. Occ. XL.

[158] K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 701-5, 419-20; A. Breeze, 'The Name of Bernicia', *The Antiquaries Journal* 89 (2009), 73-9.

From a continental Roman perspective, the army in Britain had become regionalised. As early as the third century, Herodian reported the army in Britain were 'island-bred'.[159] The fourth-century *Historia Augusta* referred meanwhile to the army of the late second-century usurper, Clodius Albinus, as *Britannos Exercitus*. If any third-century units, 'Germanic', 'Celtic' or otherwise, survived into the late fourth and early fifth centuries, their integrity as 'ethnic' groups comprised of soldiers drawn from their original provinces/homelands must have been greatly diminished. Unless each unit garnered recruits in some unspecified manner from their continental homelands, it is likely that local recruitment supplied the necessary replacement manpower.[160] Recruitment might primarily have been from within the military community, though interaction, particularly marriage, with the local populace must have increased over the generations. In the reign of Septimius Severus, soldiers were granted the official right to marry allowing them to produce legitimate heirs and bequeath property.[161]

Of course, men require brides and although soldiers perhaps attempted to marry women attached or related to other units, the local Romano-British peoples provided the most obvious and abundant source of women. Such marriages were not necessarily to the liking of the women involved, and can perhaps be viewed as a method by which the military secured their dominance over local communities. As marriage was rarely commemorated through inscription, little evidence survives of this process; however, one Barates of Palmyra, although perhaps a trader rather than a soldier, honoured the memory of his wife, Regina of the Catuvellauni at South Shields.[162] Although Regina belonged to a people of central southern Britain, it is highly likely that Wall troopers drew local women into such

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[159] Herodian, *History*, 3.6.6 .

[160] B. Dobson and J. C. Mann, 'The Roman Army in Britain and Britons in the Roman Army', *Britannia* 4 (1973), 191-205, at 201.

[161] B. Campbell, 'The Marriage of Soldiers under the Empire', *JRS* 68 (1978), 153-66, at 160-5.

[162] *RIB*, 1065.

arrangements. Exponential growth in marriages and offspring must have over time brought the *limitanei* and the rural populace into a complex web of familial ties, which perhaps eroded some distinctions between soldier and civilian. Late Roman legislation demanded sons follow their fathers into the service,[163] further accentuating the role of the *limitanei* as a social and military entity embedded within their locality. Even if the *limitanei* retained an exalted status based on weapons bearing, provincials and soldiery were further integrated by the 'Constitutio Antoniniana' of 212 which resulted in the frontier zone being populated by a citizen body.[164]

Localisation of the northern frontier garrisons is evident from 'an increased incorporation of local or Romano-British expression' in the personal appearance of the *limitanei*.[165] Penannular brooches are a case in point. Viewed as significant markers of social identity, penannular brooches distinguished the *limitanei* from the army of southern Britain.[166] Fowler types D7 and E are of particular importance. A total of eight type D7 have been found at Birdoswald, Piercebridge, South Shields and York.[167] Type E appears *per lineam valli* at Birdoswald, Chesters, Housesteads, South Shields, Vindolanda and Wallsend, and in the hinterland at Kirby Thore, Beadlam, Goldsborough, Catterick and Piercebridge.[168] Whether or not the bearers of these symbols spoke Germanic or Brythonic, widespread distribution of type E brooches suggest that a collective identity was being expressed by the *limitanei*, connected to the local frontier culture. At this juncture, such an identity was not an

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[163] *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.22.1 ed. and trans. C. Pharr, *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions* (New York, 1969), p. 181.

[164] See Chs. 2 & 3.

[165] Collins, 'Brooch use', p. 73.

[166] Halsall, 'Northern Britain', 10-13.

[167] Collins, 'Brooch use', Appendix 7.4.3.

[168] Collins, 'Brooch use', Appendix 7.4.1.

expression of ethnicity but a statement of inclusion within the military community and arms-bearing status.

Amongst the late frontier garrisons, power in a local context was still mediated through the symbolism of imperial authority. For instance, at Birdoswald the filling in of the ventilated sub-floor of the south granary around 350 was followed by a series of structural developments which speak to a concern with legitimacy.[169] First, dated by a worn Theodosian coin, a series of stone hearths were constructed towards the western end of the former south granary, around which were lost a black glass ring and a gold ear ring.[170] Focus next shifted to the north granary. Here were constructed two successive timber buildings, the first built directly atop the north granary. The second, however, required a major reconstitution of the fort's internal space. This large timber structure, interpreted as a hall, was constructed partly over the north granary and partly over the *via principalis* in alignment with the west gate, resulting in a backdrop of Roman military architecture.[171] Coin evidence provides a *terminus post quem* of *c*. 395 for the construction of the first building, with the second hall built around 470 and continuing until around 520, well after the putative 'end of Roman Britain'.[172]

Construction of the hearths and halls suggests that group identities and perceptions of hierarchies were in flux, with the differences between commander and garrison no longer distinguished through the separation of officers and men by living and eating spaces. Rather, social order within the fort appears to have been marked by proximity to the 'tyrant' who, presumably, occupied the choice position next to the central hearth. What is more, the

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[169] T. Wilmott, 'The late Roman transition at Birdoswald and on Hadrian's Wall' in eds. T. Wilmott and P. Wilson, *The Late Roman Transition in the North. Papers from the Roman Archaeology Conference, Durham 1999*, BAR. British Series 299 (2000) pp. 13-23; Wilmott, 'structural background', p. 13.

[170] Wilmott, 'structural background', p. 13.

[171] Wilmott, 'structural background', p. 13; *idem*, 'Birdoswald', p. 13.

[172] Wilmott, 'Birdoswald', p. 14.

deliberate alignment of the hall under the authoritarian glare of the former west gate

represented a bold statement of power on part of the individual who initiated the

transformation. The very act of building such an imposing structure was itself an articulation

of power in a local context: the conspicuous consumption of materials and labour required for

such a project an indication of the originator's prestige and authority. Drawing on the potency

and prestige of the west gate the (re)construction of this ancestral landscape reinvigorated the

authority of the imperial past and asserted the contemporary right of the 'tyrant' to be the

rightful heir of Roman power. For the garrisons, this might have entailed a transformation,

perhaps imperceptible, from being in the third century, for example, the 'Fourth Cohort of the

Gauls' to being in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, 'the men of Vindolanda'. Over

time, therefore unit affiliation might have been replaced by territorial identity; a development

hinted at in the *Notitia Dignitatum*'s reference to the *segontiones*, 'the men of Segontium',

the fort of Caernarfon in north-west Wales.

At other sites along the Wall and hinterland such as Vindolanda, Housesteads,

Binchester and South Shields, realignment of ancestral space occurred, perhaps again in an

effort to reassert the power of the imperial past through the creation of new dynamics of

power. For instance, at Binchester on Dere Street, the commander's accommodation was

refurbished in the late Roman period, with the installation of an elaborate bathhouse.[173] In the

post-Roman period, the site acted as more of an 'industrial estate' connected with

metalworking and butchery rather than a warrior residence.[174] If we nonetheless view these

efforts as part of a wider Bernician effort at projecting a unified identity, the use and reuse of

Roman sites reveals a concern with the trappings of Roman power amongst northern elites,

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[173] I. Ferris and R. Jones, 'Transforming an Elite: Reinterpreting Late Roman Binchester', in Wilmott and Wilson (eds.), *Late Roman Transition*, pp. 1-11, at 3-4.

[174] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

with the corralling of cattle and the production of metalwork marking Binchester as a site of special significance. Northumbrian literary sources also reveal the elites' favouring of former Roman sites, particularly on the Wall. Bede refers to a Northumbrian site of *Ad Murum*, 'At Wall'.[175] The anonymous and Bedan *vitae* of Saint Cuthbert, written in the early eighth century, note Carlisle as a seat of Bernician power, as noted above. Of further interest is the Anonymous' tale that Cuthbert, journeying from the monastery at Hexham to Carlisle paused to minister to the local population at *regio Ahse*, a site identified as the Roman fort of Great Chesters, *Aesica*.[176] Preservation of the Romano-British name, *Ahse*, and the ease at which the inhabitants of the local countryside assembled at the forts might suggest that this site had formerly been a Brittonic power centre. Again, use of *regio* might suggest the presence of an earlier, Brittonic political unit. Further west, Birdoswald's dramatic setting, perched high on a lofty plateau surrounded by the River Irthing, has been likened to the British use of hillforts. However, rather than occupied by Britons opposed to the 'Germanic' Bernicii, it is possible the occupants of these forts might have thought of themselves as the western Bernicii. Elsewhere, 'Germanic' material, such as the spear head from Carvoran and brooches from Benwell and Housesteads,[177] might suggest the formation of a hybrid culture which drew upon various cultural influences, Roman, local, and North Sea. Finds of type F penannular brooches, considered of post-Roman date, from Eskmeals, Old Church Brampton and Maelsgate might be an indication of western Bernician identity in the fifth century.

That cultural 'mixing' took place in the western sections of the Wall zone or close proximity is suggested by the finds from the Mote of Mark, the prominent fortified site

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[175] Bede, *HE*, iii.21.

[176] Anon. *vita Cuthberti*, 4.5.

[177] Dark, 'Sub-Roman', 112, with n. 11.

located in Dumfries and Galloway, where the Urr Water enters the Solway Firth.[178] The hillock was enclosed by a rampart, within which occupation was dated between the first half of the sixth century into the second half of the seventh century, where the site was destroyed by fire.[179] The Mote of Mark appears to have been an industrial site, where evidence for metalworking in iron, copper-alloy, gold and silver survives in the form of crucibles. The site was clearly in contact, directly or indirectly, with traders from Gaul and the Mediterranean as illustrated by finds of E ware and Bi pottery.[180] The Mote of Mark was also within an Anglian sphere of influence, demonstrated with finds of 'Germanic' glass and clay moulds which indicate the creation of brooches in Germanic style.[181] There are also pieces of sandstone from the site which appear to be marked with runic inscriptions, another indication that close relations existed between the site and areas further east. Various mechanisms could have brought this material to the Mote of Mark, one of which was, in all likelihood, being within the zone of Bernician influence, perhaps from an early date.

The early Bernicii of the Wall appear to have utilised a range of material cultures and influences: Brittonic, Germanic and Roman and integrated them into one composite identity; indeed, 'Germanic' and 'Brittonic' linguistic groups might have existed within the late frontier community without this yet being an issue which resulted in confrontation between 'ethnic' groups. Perhaps it was only with the influx of 'Germanic' persons from further south that changed the dynamic within early Bernicia, leading to a struggle for hegemony over the Wall as well as contests *per lineam valli* as groups to the north and south of the Wall attempted to extend their power throughout the region. Fragmentation of linear Bernicia

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[178] L. Laing and D. Longley (eds.), *The Mote of Mark: A Dark Age Hillfort in South-West Scotland* (Oxford, 2006), p. 1.

[179] Laing and Longley, *Mote of Mark*, p. 24.

[180] Laing and Longley, *Mote of Mark*, pp. 109-12.

[181] Laing and Longley, *Mote of Mark*, pp. 142-4.

might have followed, until the eastern Bernicii reasserted their hegemony in later decades; however, this must remain speculative. It is a truism that Bede tells us virtually nothing of how the Bernicii gained control of this area, perhaps because although this territory was ruled by Bernicii, these groups were known to have been somewhat 'Brittonic' in language and culture.

The Intramural Zone: Barbarians and Romans

Discerning the relationship between 'Roman' and 'barbarian' in northern Britain is problematic. Britain's marginality to the western empire meant that emperors or their Caesars were rarely present in northern Britain during the late antique period; indeed, Magnus Maximus and Constantine III aside, the last emperor to visit Britain was Constans in 343. Prior to that, Constantius I and Constantine I had both spent time in Britain campaigning against the northern *gentes*, a circumstance reflected in Britain's fleeting presence in contemporary sources. Deprived of a narrative such as Ammianus' recounting Julian's activities in Gaul or that detailing Constantius' and Valentinian's campaigns against and negotiations with the Rhine-Danube barbarians, we are bereft of information which could be used to construct a (relatively) coherent account of late Romano-barbarian interactions on Britain's northern frontier. Nonetheless, Ammianus has much to tell of frontier interactions which can be usefully applied to the British situation.

Frontier peoples required 'management'. Most effective was the threat, real or implied, created by the presence of the emperor or his Caesar in the frontier zone. This is most evident on the Rhine-Danube frontier where warfare against the Franks, Alamanni, Suebi, and Sarmatians was commonplace.[182] However, scholars have argued that the threat of the barbarians in real terms may have been overemphasised in order to justify huge

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[182] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 16.10.20.

expenditure on the Roman military which guaranteed the emperor's position.[183] Ammianus nevertheless reports that Franks and Alamanni were found in Roman territory besieging Cologne and Autun.[184] Frontier troubles were most acute in the absence of the emperor or his Caesar and it has been argued that the barbarians were aware of the removal of imperial power from the frontiers.[185] If neither could respond in person, a leading subordinate would be dispatched in their place.[186] But the most effective solution was the residency in the frontier districts of the emperor or his Caesar, as illustrated by Julian's presence in Gaul from 355.[187] Julian campaigned vigorously in order to subdue the Alamanni and Franks, with fighting taking place on both sides of the Rhine; the pinnacle of his western achievements, though, appears to have been the Battle of Strasbourg (357), where an Alamannic host led by the *reges* Chonodomarius and Vestralpus was defeated utterly.[188]

Returning to the British situation, it is possible that the Pictish and Scottic raids of the 360s might have been the result of such neglect to the northern frontier; the first attack came after the Picts broke a treaty, but this might be explained by the lack of subsidies flowing to the barbarians from the Romans. Alternatively, this attack and that of 364 might stem from information flowing into *barbaricum* regarding Julian's usurpation, his removal to the east and death in Persia. In 367 the *barbarica conspiratio* between the Dicalydones, Verturiones and Attacotti overcame the British provinces.[189] This took place in conjunction with Saxon attacks on Gaul suggesting the free exchange of information between northern Britain and

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[183] Drinkwater, 'Rhine Germans', pp. 114-115.

[184] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 15.4.7-13; 15.8.19-20; 16.2.1.

[185] Lee, *Information and Frontiers*, pp. 131-6.

[186] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Silvanus to Gaul: 15.5.1-2; Lupicinus to Britain: 20.1.

[187] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 15.8.5-14; 16.1-5.

[188] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Strasbourg: 16.12; fighting beyond the Rhine: 17.1; 17.10.1-8; against Franks: 17.2.

[189] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 20.1.1, 27.8., 28.3.1-2. See Ch. 3.

Germania. Recently, the barbarian element in the 'conspiracy' has been downplayed, with the suppression of a usurper, Valentinius, interpreted as Theodosius' principal aim. However, the usurpation came as a result of the 'conspiracy' which witnessed the capture of the *dux* and the death of the *comes maritimus tractus*, Britain's two highest ranking military officials. It has been suggested nonetheless that the events of this decade were exceptional, with northern Britain less volatile and not under the same barbarian 'pressures' found elsewhere in the empire.[190] While there was no expansion of Pictish power into the Roman provinces as found, for instance, with the Franks in northern Gaul, Britain's peaceful state might be a consequence of our main source, Ammianus Marcellinus, ending his narrative in 378, for similar incursions are reported later in the fourth century.[191]

For some scholars, the consequent lull can be explained by the intramural peoples' position as clients, which came into being either as a result of Theodosius' organisation of the frontier or arrangements made by Maximus prior to his departure in 383. However, given their proximity to the frontier, a relationship must have existed between the *limitanei* and the intramural peoples independent of any specific 'policies' enacted under Theodosius or Maximus. Distribution of gifts was a key diplomatic weapon utilised by the Roman state to cajole barbarian rulers, being a measure of imperial largesse from which the recipient increased their prestige within their own society. In the late second and early third centuries, the Romans are known to have paid subsidies to the northern extramural Britons. Septimius Severus' negotiations with the Caledonii and Maeatae are noted by Dio.[192]

Again in the fourth century the campaigns of Constantius I and (probably) Constantine I against the Picts would have brought the intramural peoples into close contact

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[190] Esmonde-Cleary, 'Northern Britain', 35.

[191] Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma Chonicon*, iv; Claudian, *De Consulatu Stilichonis* II, 250-255.

[192] Dio, *Roman History*, 77.14.3.

with the imperial authorities. Conflict probably occurred with intramural groups also, but subsidies were certainly paid to favoured groups or individuals, such as the gold uniface medallion of the Constantinian dynasty found in Dumfries and Galloway.[193] Loopholes in the medallion indicate that it was worn as a personal adornment which articulated the prestige accrued through such interactions with the Roman state. Amongst the key sites for such Roman-barbarian interaction appears to have been the Roman fort at Cramond, near Edinburgh. This served as a supply depot during the Severan campaigns, although the discovery of late third-century pottery and coins of the emperors Geta, Caracalla, Tetricus, Probus, Diocletian, Galerius, Constantine I, and Constantine II indicate continuing, if spasmodic, activity into the fourth century.[194] However, it is vital to observe that barbarian hostility did not severe diplomatic links or prevent the payment of future subsidies. Ammianus, for example, informs us that the Alamannic king Hortarius, who had escaped from the battle of Strasbourg, came to collect gifts from the Romans 'as was usual'.[195] It would seem unlikely the departure of the imperial court disrupted permanently communications with the intramural peoples: in the emperor's absence, the most important military official resident in northern Britain was the *dux* – this official presumably organised treaties such as that broken in 364, with the barbarians and dispensed payments to favoured leaders. He was also responsible for counteracting barbarian raids, and the *dux* Fullofaudes was captured doing so during the 'barbarian conspiracy'.[196]

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[193] R. Bland, 'Gold for the Barbarians? Uniface Gold Medallions of the House of Constantine Found in Britain and Ireland', *Britannia* (2006), 1-9, no. 3.

[194] C. Cessford, 'Post-Severan Cramond: A Late Roman and Early Historic British and Anglo-Saxon Religious Site', *The Heroic Age* 4 (Winter, 2001), http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/4/Cessford.html. Accessed 01/03/2013.

[195] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 17.10.8.

[196] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 27.8.1.

In fact, the Romans appear to have maintained in the third century a permanent presence between the Walls. Following the Severan campaigns, units known as *exploratores* were stationed beyond the Wall at High Rochester and Risingham on Dere Street and Netherby, 'Castra Exploratorum', in the west.[197] Their role was to supervise the intramural groups between Tyne and Forth. Although its veracity is disputed,[198] the seventh-century Ravenna Cosmography may list a number of *loci* where the *exploratores* met the intramural peoples: *locus Damnoni*, *locus Maponi* (perhaps Loch Maben in Dumfries), and *locus Manavi* – sites perhaps assignable to the Damnonii, the Selgovae (or Anavionenses) and the Maeatae.[199] These units appear to have been withdrawn by the beginning of the fourth century, perhaps indicating greater emphasis on diplomatic links rather than a military presence between the Walls.

But what did it mean to be Roman 'clients'? There is clearly an assumption that the intramural peoples were peaceable clients, who enacted pro-Roman policies. However, commitment to long-term policies of clientship in fact came solely from the Romans, as made clear by Constantius II's dealings with the habitually troublesome Sarmatae. This group, described by Ammianus as *latrocinandi peritissimum genus*, 'a people most skilled in brigandage' were engaged during the 350s in ravaging the provinces of Upper Moesia and Lower Pannonia.[200] Their continuing depredations resulted in an imperial campaign which forced the Sarmatian *regalis* Zizais into submission, compelling him to provide hostages and other sureties of their continued good behaviour.[201] Despite their activities, Ammianus noted

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[197] K. A. Steer, 'Roman and Native in North Britain: The Severan Reorganisation', in Richmond (ed.), *Roman and Native*, pp. 91-111. The sites were unoccupied by the fourth century: Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, pp. 241-2. See, *RIB*, 1235, 1262, 1270.

[198] Rivet and Smith, *PNRB*, pp. 395-6.

[199] Steer, 'The Severan Reorganisation', p. 98.

[200] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 16.10.20.

[201] Seager, 'Roman Policy on the Rhine-Danube', 582-7.

the Sarmatae received favourable treatment from Constantius *ut semper Romanorum clientes*, 'as clients always of the Romans'.[202] But it should be emphasised that only in defeat did client-status appear to be of significance to the Sarmatae – that is, during negotiating their submission when the imperial presence prevented them from plundering Roman territory. Barbarian loyalty – whatever the alleged status of the group – had to be extracted forcibly from the *gens* in question.

If then we regard the intramural peoples as frontier *gentes* similar to those found on other imperial limits, it becomes possible to re-evaluate their status as clients protecting the provinces from Pictish attacks, whether before or after 367. Even if we do not regard these groups as Picts, at least in ethnographic terms, it must be the case that stresses within barbarian society required periodic bouts of warfare for economic and political stability. Indeed, their supposed peaceable tendencies are probably a result of Roman historiographical disinterest in northern Britain rather than any natural inclination on the part of the barbarians. In fact, even scholars who regard the intramural peoples as long-term adherents to the Roman state accept that the intramural peoples played some role in the *barbarica conspiratio*. This seems evident from Ammianus' depiction of the *areani* and their dereliction of duty:

> *Id enim illis erat officium, ut ultro citroque, per longa spatia discurentes,*
> *vicinarum gentium strepitus nostris ducibus intimarent.*[203]

> For it was their duty to roam here and there in different directions through
> boundless areas and to recount information about the uproar of neighbouring
> peoples to our leaders.

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[202] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 17.12.15.

[203] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 28.3.8.

The *areani* were perhaps successors to the third-century *exploratores*, discussed above; and given the activities of the earlier *exploratores*, it is likely that the neighbouring *gentes* through whom the *areani* moved were the intramural peoples, plotting with them to pass information to the 'Pictish' Verturiones and Dicalydones, the main culprits, according to Ammianus. However, unlike the *exploratores* the *areani*, despite performing a similar function gathering information from beyond the frontier, may not have been regular Roman forces. Ammianus considered the *areani* to be *genus hominum a veteribus institutum*, 'a rank of men established from ancient times'.[204] He spoke of them in his discussion of Constans' visit to Britain in 343, though this does not necessarily mean he considered Constans to have formed the *areani*. Hind suggests that *genus hominum* was applied by Ammianus to civilian communities, in this case the inhabitants of the settlements associated with the Wall forts and possibly those of the old intramural forts.[205] Collusion between the *areani* and the intramural peoples, and even the Pictish *gentes*, might have been a result of the close association between these groups, perhaps one reinforced through kinship. Knowledge of the vernacular would have been essential. The conspiracy between the intramural peoples and the Picts has been taken as extraordinary, the result of pressure from northern Picts on the peaceable Britons. However, when St Patrick again sheds light on northern affairs, we once again find Britons and Picts colluding to raid external territories and divide the spoils. Rather than exceptions fortuitously caught in our sources at widely separated chronological junctures, the combination of Pict and Briton as raiders in the north would appear to be the normality.[206]

Elite intramural identity must have nonetheless been heavily influenced by interaction with the militarised *romanitas* present amongst the garrisons of the northern frontier. This

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[204] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 28.3.8.

[205] J. G. F. Hind, 'Who Betrayed Britain to the Barbarians in A.D. 367?', *Northern History* 19 (1983), 1-7, at 4-7.

[206] *Contra*, Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 35.

interaction, indeed, appears to have resulted in the creation of new polities between the Walls. As we have seen, gift-giving was a key diplomatic weapon in creating barbarian leaders beyond the frontiers. In the intramural zone, targeted diplomacy is evident at sites such as Alclud, Eildon Hills and Edinburgh Castle and from the fourth century onwards groupings and identities began to coalesce around these centres which persisted into the early medieval period. Acting as contact points with the Roman world, receipt of targeted diplomacy allowed the occupants of these sites to increase social differentiation between themselves and the surrounding populaces. Another group were located in the Tweed valley, where clusters of late Roman material indicate contact with imperial authorities.[207] Further contacts are evident from Springwood near Roxburgh in the central lowlands and Bamburgh, perhaps a Roman signal station.[208]

Above all other intramural sites, however, is Traprain Law situated amongst the Votadini.[209] Located in rich agricultural land in the mid-Lothian plain, Traprain Law is a volcanic plug whose prominence is juxtaposed against the rolling landscape within which its sits. Due to the abundance of Roman material at Traprain and the absence of military installations from their territory, the Votadini are viewed as ardently pro-Roman. However, as argued above, viewing frontier *gentes* as either pro- or anti-Roman is far too simplistic and peaceful relations cannot be established on the basis of Roman material at specific sites. Nor can the absence of early Roman period military sites from Votadinian territory be a gauge with which assess attitudes in the late fourth century, despite what this says about previous interactions.

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[207] Hunter, 'Beyond the Frontier', p. 96.

[208] Hunter, 'Beyond the Frontier', pp. 96-7.

[209] F. Hunter, 'Hillfort and Hacksilber: Traprain Law in the late Roman Iron Age and Early Historic period', in Hunter and Painter, *Late Roman Silver*, pp. 3-10; Erdich *et al.*, 'Traprain Law', 441-5.

The high-point for Roman-barbarian interactions at Traprain Law came in the first and second centuries, when the empire maintained a presence in northern Britain unmatched in later centuries.[210] From the period *c*. 75-150, Traprain has produced the largest assemblage of samian ware, including thirty dishes, from a non-Roman site north of Hadrian's Wall; the major period of supply being the early Antonine period when close relations existed between the inhabitants of Traprain Law and the Roman supply depot at Inveresk.[211] As samian ware was a highly prized commodity amongst 'barbarian' societies, access to and control of such prestigious material accentuated the status of Traprain and its inhabitants. Patterns of coin loss also indicate an intense period of interaction during the earlier Roman period, with the Agricolan and Antonine interventions the periods of maximum circulation.[212] Nonetheless, almost two-thirds of the 65 coins recovered from Traprain Law, the largest amount from any native site in northern Britain, belong to the period 250-410(excluding those from the hoard).[213] Of the fourth- and fifth-century coinage, there are, for example, five coins of Constantine I;[214] two each of Constantius II[215] and Magnentius;[216] and single issues of Valentinian I, Gratian and Arcadius.[217] However these are low-denomination, base-metal issues suggesting they are neither booty or a subsidy from the Roman authorities – some sort of peaceful interaction with the province appears to have brought them north; it has been

[210] Erdich, *et al*, 'Traprain Law', 451, 453-4.

[211] Erdich, *et al*, 'Traprain Law', 449.

[212] M. F. Sekulla, 'The Roman coins from Traprain Law', *PSAS* 112 (1982), 285-94, at 286-7.

[213] Sekulla, 'Roman coins', 288.

[214] Sekulla, 'Roman coins', Catalogue, nos. 40-45.

[215] Sekulla, 'Roman coins', nos. 46, 49.

[216] Sekulla, 'Roman coins', nos. 47-48.

[217] Sekulla, 'Roman coins', nos. 53, 54, 55.

suggested that Traprain Law was merely a ceremonial centre which witnessed ritual deposition.[218] Was this the small changed required to pay the toll at the Wall?

Although the bulk of the material from Traprain Law dates from the first and second centuries, it is hard to argue against the notion that the Romans maintained a 'special relationship' with the Votadini. But given the policies of gift-giving and targeted diplomacy handed out to groups who were, for one reason or another, ostensibly hostile towards the Roman state, there is little reason to doubt that the Votadini did not also, on occasion, display such predatory tendencies in regards their relationship with Roman Britain. That said, high-status material was making its way to Traprain in the late Roman period. It would seem that the people of Traprain were content to display their *romanitas* through use of conical bowls and glass drinking-vessels, fragments of which have been found at the site and also forts *per lineam valli* such as Birdoswald and Housesteads.[219] In fact, a shared military identity between Traprain and the Wall appears to have been displayed through the use of 'Roman' belt mounts, strap ends and buckles recovered from the site.[220] The presence of a single type E penannular brooch from Edinburgh, examples of which were used by the Wall garrison, suggest that this high-status identity was shared by other groups within Votadinian territory.[221] This might actually reflect service of Votadinian men in the Roman military; on the Rhine frontier it was commonplace for barbarians to serve in the army then return home taking the trappings of military prestige with them. There is little reason to suppose this type of interaction did not also occur in Britain. Furthermore, three type F brooches dated to the mid-fifth century have been recovered from Traprain, with a single example known from

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[218] P. Hill, 'Traprain Law: the Votadini and the Romans', *Scottish Archaeological Review* 4 (1987), 85-91, at 90.

[219] J. Price, 'Late Roman glass vessels in the Hadrian's Wall frontier region', in Collins and Allason-Jones (eds.), *Finds from the Frontier*, pp. 37-49, at pp. 42, 43.

[220] Coulston, 'Military equipment', App. 6.1, nos. 67-73.

[221] Collins, 'Brooch use', App. 7.3, no. 17; also: nos. 50-52.

North Berwick.[222] These are seen as early medieval accoutrements, though they are found on Roman military sites in Cumbria and north-eastern Yorkshire, again indicative of a wider frontier identity existing amongst its bearers.

Into this complex web of interrelations we must place the enigmatic hoard of late Roman *hacksilber* recovered from Traprain Law. Dated to the early fifth century, this impressive hoard contained 50 bowls, numerous other fragments of dishes and drinking vessels, spoons and other assorted items.[223] It has been interpreted as the spoils of 'Pictish' raiding,[224] a pattern of behaviour perhaps continued and commemorated in the *Gododdin*. The hoard might equally represent the payment of a subsidy to allies protecting the northern frontier; or it might be a tribute persuading potentially hostile forces to stay beyond the frontier. There was, perhaps, little difference between these two options in reality.

The compilation of the hoard and its weight indeed suggests some sort of ordered payment, though the circumstances are unclear. Again, we should emphasise that frontier relations were multi-faceted: sometimes hostile; sometimes peaceful. If the hoard was the result of raiding, it might have occurred as the result of earlier Roman subsidies drying up, compelling the leaders of Traprain to launch plundering raids in order to sustain their position. Whatever the case, it seems clear that this level of interaction cannot have left the Votadini unchanged. Refortification of Traprain in the years around 400, where a rampart was constructed 3,500 ft. in length and 12 ft. in thickness which now reduced the enclosed space on the summit from 40 to 30 square meters suggests that the occupants were engaged in re-structuring the ancestral landscape, something which, as we have seen, seems to have

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[222] Collins, 'Brooch use', pp. 72, 77.

[223] A. Kaufmann-Heinimann, 'The Traprain treasure: survey and perspectives', in Hunter and Painter (eds.), *Late Roman Silver*, pp. 243-61, Tab. 3.

[224] A. O. Curle, *The Treasure of Traprain: A Scottish Hoard of Roman Silver Plate* (Glasgow, 1923), pp. 106, 108.

occurred at Birdoswald virtually simultaneously.[225] This might be interpreted as a re-ordering of the site to reflect a new political ascendency and even wider changes within the Votadinian group identity, with greater emphasis placed on the exclusivity of the militarised elite of Traprain and other high-status settlements.

The ethnogenesis of frontier *gentes* resulted, then, from two primary interrelated processes; first, the Roman presence in the frontier zone forced groups to coalesce for political reasons; second, targeted diplomacy accentuated the power and influence of certain groups, leading to the creation of political units centred on high-status sites which controlled a large territory through military power and the control of prestige items. It was these creations of the late Roman period, not the tribal (non)entities recorded in earlier Roman sources which persisted into the earliest medieval centuries.

The Intramural Zone in the Post-Roman Period

Throughout the intramural zone the various small kingdoms, Brittonic and Anglian, attempted to appropriate and harness the power of the imperial in order to buttress and legitimise their position in the new circumstances of the post-Roman world. Use of Roman symbolism was widespread and combined with the manipulation and interpretation of the ancestral landscape to substaniate claims over land and peoples. However, the relationship which Brittonic and Anglian groups had with the imperial past and present was somewhat different: Western Brittonic groups continued to receive imperial largesse, though perhaps indirectly and could in some sense regard themselves as allied to the Roman empire, while the Anglian peoples further east were appropriating the symbols of imperial power, possibly without the ability to claim direct links or ancestral contacts with the imperial court. As we

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[225] R. W. Feachem, 'The Fortifications on Traprain Law', *PSAS* 89 (1955-6), 284-9, at 289. Feachem suggests that the latest refortification should be dated *c.* 370 to correspond with the Theodosian conversion of the Votadini into a 'treaty-state'.

have seen, similar processes were at work on and below the Wall. At the upper reaches of the intramural zone, the (re)interpretation of the ancestral landscape and its associated *romanitas* was also affecting notions of identity and space, made clear by Bede's statement regarding the location of Alclud:

> *Cuius operis ibidem facti, id est ualli latissimi et altissimi, usque hodie certissima uestigia cernere licet. Incipit autem duorum ferme milium spatio a monasterio Aebbercurnig ad occidentem in loco qui sermone Pictorum Peanfahel lingua autem Anglorum Penneltun appellatur, et tendens contra occidentem terminatur iuxta urbem Alcluith.*

> The clearest traces of the work constructed there, that is, a wall most wide and high, can be seen to this day. It starts almost two miles west of the monastery at *Aebbercurnig* in the place which the Picts call *Peanfahel* while in the language of the English it is called *Penneltun*. It stretches westward where it marks the boundaries of *urbs Alcluith*.[226]

Talking of the Antonine Wall, which had been unoccupied since the later second century, Bede claims that it extended to Alclud, the powerful British kingdom situated on the Forth. Bede exhibited a peculiar interest in Alclud, motivated by fear of its political and ecclesiastical strength and the possible return of heretical British practices if it overcame a weakened Northumbria.[227] Bede in fact portrayed a most uncharacteristic familiarity with Alclud, describing it as *civitas Brettonum munitissima*, 'a most strongly defended *civitas* of

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[226] Bede, *HE*, i.12.

[227] C. Stancliffe, *Bede and the Britons*, Fourteenth Whithorn Lecture (Whithorn, 2007); A. Murray, 'Bede and the Unchosen Race' in H. Pryce and J. Watts (eds.), *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 52-67.

the Britons'.[228] Indeed, Bede demonstrated unusual precision when it came to defining this British polity:

> *occidentalis supra se, hoc est ad dexteram sui, habet urbem Alcluith, quod lingua eorum significant Petram Cluit; est enim iuxta fluuium nominis illius*[229]

> …while above the western, that is, on its right bank, is the *urbs* of *Alcluith*, which means in their language 'Clyde Rock' because it stands near the river of that name.

The *urbs* of Alclud was known to the compilers of the Book of Armagh as Ail Cluaithe. Its war-band were familiar to Patrick, who addressed his *Epistola ad Milites Corotici* towards them in an effort to cease slave-raiding amongst his spiritual flock. This Coroticus has been identified as the Ceretic *guletic* of the Harleian lineage of Rhun ap Arthgal.[230]

Adomnán, abbot of Iona, further underlines the importance of Alclud to Irish Sea politics. In his *Vita Sancti Columbae*, written around the turn of the eighth century to commemorate the life of Iona's founder, Columba, Adomnán relates how the saint successfully prophesied the death of a certain *Rederco Filio Tothail, Qui In Petra Cloithe Regnabit*, 'Rhydderch ap Tudwal who was reigning at Clyde Rock'.[231] Although a pseudo-historical tale illustrating the power, authority, and influence of the saint as a confidant and prophet to the rulers of northern Britain, Adomnán's account nevertheless simultaneously

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[228] Bede, *HE*, i.1.

[229] Bede, *HE*, 1.12.

[230] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 35-6. J. B. Bury, *St Patrick: The Life and World of Ireland's Saint*, Foreword by Thomas Charles-Edwards (London, 2010), pp. 151-8; *contra*, Orchard, 'Coroticus', pp. 107-16. See Ch. 4, p. 192.

[231] Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, ed. and trans. A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (Oxford, 1991), i.15.

alludes to Alclud's significance around the time of composition, that is, *c*. 700, whilst providing rare external verification of a figure prominent in traditions of the 'Old North'.[232]

Adomnán, who perhaps had less to fear from Alclud than Bede, not only depicted the relationship between Columba and Rhydderch as one of mutual respect and friendship, but defined Rhydderch's identity in terms of his dynastic and territorial associations rather than his ethnicity, a contrast with his description of Cadwallon as *rex Britonum*.[233] Bede had also referred to Cadwallon in these terms.[234] Bede's description of Cadwallon was venomous due to Cadwallon's slaying of Edwin, Northumbria's first Christian king. While Adomnán does not exhibit similar antipathy, their attitudes might converge in their lack of interest in Cadwallon's parentage and kingdom. It might be claimed that *rex Brettonum* was designed to signal Cadwallon's paramountcy amongst the Britons; however, as Bede uses *rex Brettonum* of Cerdic,[235] this term was perhaps a general designation rather than a description of individual power. Distance and disinterest (or dislike, for Bede) resulted in the assignation of ethnic identity.

The power of Alclud in the eighth century is thus evident; and the fame attached to Rhydderch's name in *Vita Columbae*, as well as in Brythonic tradition, probably demonstrates his authority and influence in the sixth. The basis of this power is clear.[236] Alclud was a nodal point for contacts with the Mediterranean world, similar to other Brittonic

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[232] *HB*, §68; *EWGT*, no. 6; A. O. H. Jarman, 'Early Stages in the Development of the Myrddin Legend', in R. Bromwich and R. B. Jones (eds.), *Astudiaethau Ar Yr Hengerdd/Studies in Old Welsh Poetry* (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 326-49.

[233] Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, i.1.

[234] Bede, *HE*, ii.20: *rex Brettonum*.

[235] Bede, *HE*, iv.23.

[236] L. Alcock, 'A multi-disciplinary chronology for Alt Clut, Castle Rock, Dumbarton', *PSAS* 107 (1975-6), 103-113; L. Alcock and E. A. Alcock, 'Reconnaissance excavations on Early Historic fortifications and other royal sites in Scotland, 1974-84: 4, Excavations at Alt Clut, Clyde Rock, Strathclyde, 1974-5', *PSAS* 120 (1990) 95-149.

settlements such as Tintagel and Degannwy. For instance, the site produced four to five

shards of Gallic E-ware, twelve fragments of Bi and Bii amphorae and six shards of what the

excavators described as 'Germanic' glass.[237] That much, if not all, of the consumables

contained in these ceramics was consumed on-site suggests that prestige in the wider political

community was very much expressed through an individual's access to the court of Alclud.

For the elite who dwelt in the exposed hillfort of Alclud, their position at the head of the

northern Wall and their access to Roman goods and artefacts could be interpreted as a symbol

of *romanitas* in which they situated themselves as heirs to imperial authority in northern

Britain in opposition to the heathen Picts and upstart Angles.

To the south of Alclud, beyond the River Irvine, was Aeron, Ayrshire. The occupants

of this region during the Roman period are unknown: it may have been Damnonian territory

or controlled by either the Novantae or Selgovae. However, the region appears to have

possessed a certain degree of fame during the medieval period, as suggested by the

Gododdin's reference to the hero Cynon:

> *Pan dei y cyuarchant / nyt oed hoedyl dianc / dialgur aruon / cyrchei eur ceinyo /*
>
> *arurchyat urython / browys meirch cynon.*[238]

> When he came to battle / he was not one to escape with his life / the defender of
>
> Aeron / attacked, the gold-adorned hero of the Britons / Spirited were the horses of
>
> Cynon.

Cynon may have been a genuine historical figure, a proposition reflected unwittingly by Bede

who recounted a miraculous story which took place *in regione Nordanhymbrorum quae*

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[237] Alcock and Alcock, 'Excavations at Alt Clut', 113.

[238] *Gododdin of Aneirin*, ed. Koch, B1.23.

uocatur Incuneningum, 'in a region of the Northumbrians which is called *Incuneningum'*.[239]

This is identified as modern Cunningham, the northern division of Ayrshire, with

Incuneningum perhaps meaning 'Among the Cuneningas', that is, 'the descendants of

Cynan'.[240] However, it may mean 'cyning-ham', from the Anglo-Saxon term for king: that is,

'king's hamlet'.

The districts adjacent to the middle and eastern sections of the upper Wall around the

head of the Firth of Forth were known as Manau; a *regio* incorporating Clackmannan, 'the

stone of Manau', on the northern shore of the Forth near Alloa and Slamannan, 'the moor of

Manau', south of Falkirk on the river Avon. *Historia Brittonum* suggests that Manau was a

territorial sub-division of Gododdin.[241] Taking *Manau Guotodin* as the genitive construction,

'Manau of the Gododdin', this name may have distinguished the southerly, Brythonic Manau

from a 'Pictish' Manau beyond the Forth.[242] However, Irish sources depict Manau as a

territory in its own right, one which Aedán mac Gabrán sought to extend his authority.[243] To

Adomnán, the occupants of this region were the Miathi, a people whom he has Columba

describe as *barbari*; they appear to have been the victims of Aedán mac Gabrán's

acquisitiveness.[244] Aedán's interest here perhaps brought him eventually into confrontation

with Æthelfrith of the Bernicii, a similarly ambitious king expanding his authority amongst

neighbouring peoples. Manau's position as a distinct political entity is suggested by *Yspeil*

Taliesin, which recounts Urien raiding against on both territories Manau and Gododdin

separately:

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[239] Bede, *HE*, v.12.

[240] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 10.

[241] *HB*, §63.

[242] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 5-6.

[243] *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, ed. by S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill, Part I, Text and Translation (Dublin, 1983), 582.1.

[244] Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, i.8; see Fraser, *Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 133-8.

Ae varch ydanaw yg godeu gweith mynaw / a chwanec anaw bud am li amlaw .[245]

his horse under him, to make for Manaw / seeking wealth and much plunder besides

And:

hyueid a gododin a lleu towys, .[246]

Bold against Gododdin, bright leader

It is perhaps helpful, then, to treat Manau, that is, the territory located around the head of the Forth, as a separate early medieval polity or kingdom, bounded by Gododdin to the south and the Picts to the north. An important part of their territory, at least prior to Northumbrian overlordship in the mid-seventh century may have been the prominent site located in the Forth:

Orientalis habet in medio sui urbem Giudi.[247]

In the middle of the eastern branch is the *urbs Giudi*.

Despite, recent attempts to relocate *Giudi* to the northern shores of the Forth, the most plausible location for this *urbs* remains Stirling.[248] As this site was enclosed by both Maeatae and Manau place-names, it might be justifiably assigned to their territory, at least until the reign of Oswy.[249] The presence of several 'powys' names in Stirling's environs suggest Roman influence in the form of *pagi*, Roman administrative units which might have had a boundary or military function, though this remains speculative.

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[245] *PT*, v.6-7

[246] *PT*, vii.16 ; *TT*, ed. Clancy, p. 86.

[247] Bede, *HE*, i.12.

[248] J. E. Fraser, 'Bede, the Firth of Forth, and the Location of *Urbs Iudeu*', *SHR* 87 (2008), 1-25.

[249] *HE*, iii.24; *HB*, §65.

Neighbouring Manau, on the southern shores of the Firth of Forth, another Brittonic grouping, Gododdin, who saw themselves as dwelling upon the frontier which separated them from the peoples beyond:

> *Leech leud ud tut leuure gododin stre stre ancat ancat cyngor cyngor temestyl*
>
> *trameryn lestyr trameryn lu.*[250]

> The rock of Lleu's people, the people of Lleu's hill Gododdin' frontier, the frontier
>
> was held Counsel was taken, storm gathering; the vessel from over the Forth; a
>
> host from over the Forth.

Lleuddinion and Lleu's hill are seen as references respectively to Lothian and Edinburgh Castle Rock.[251] More often, this hill is referred to in the *Gododdin* as Din Eidyn, the base from which the Gododdin war-band left for their disastrous expedition to *Catraeth*. But most importantly, when looking northward over the Forth, the poet saw heathens, *gynt*, a word stemming from the Latin *gentes*, 'peoples'. Thus just as Alclud's elite defined themselves through association with the Wall, the Gododdin interpreted themselves as separate physically and spiritually from the heathen Picts and Scots of far northern Britain.[252]

Romanitas formed an intrinsic part of Gododdin identity and the legacy of Rome was again to be found in the ancestral landscape of their territory. For instance, the former Roman fort at Cramond, Lothian, west of Edinburgh, appears to have played an important role in the post-Roman period.[253] Cramond's ancient remains may have exuded imperial power: the Cramond sculptured lioness, though found in the river, must once have been a potent symbol

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[250] *Gododdin of Aneirin*, ed. Koch, B2.24.

[251] *The Gododdin*, ed. Jackson, pp. 75-8.

[252] Koch, *GA*, BI.5.

[253] Cessford, 'Cramond',

of *romanitas*.[254] Cramond and its environs were, moreover, part of a wider 'landscape of power'; the village of Kirkliston, a mere five kilometres distant, incorporates the Brythonic element *llys*, 'hall', a Brythonic term indicating the presence of high-status, secular power. Associated with this settlement is the 'Catstane', an inscribed memorial stone and another mark of elite power.[255] Further place-names such as Wester Ochiltree – *uchel-tref*, 'high-settlement' – and Ecclesmachan, the first element which contains Brythonic *eglwys*, 'church' demonstrate the longevity of British as a language of authority in the region.

Anglian textual sources identify a number of seventh-century Bernician royal settlements located between Tweed and Forth which have names of Brythonic derivation, suggesting an earlier existence as Gododdin strongholds. For instance, *vita Wilfridi* refers to *Inbroninis*, an unidentified royal *urbs* where Ecgfrith imprisoned Wilfrid.[256] *Inbroninis* is a compound noun of *bron*, 'breast', and *ynys*, 'island', and may thus refer to a coastal site common amongst the Bernicii; however, *ynys* is also used in Wales to denote hillocks surrounded by wetlands, such as 'Ynys' near Criccieth, thus an inland site is also possible for *Inbroninis*.[257] *Vita Wilfridi* also names *Dinbaer*, Dunbar, governed by Ecgfrith's *praefectus*, Tydlin as a Bernician royal centre. Other sites have been identified through excavation, such as Dalmahoy, south-west of Edinburgh which may have functioned as an assembly site for the corralling of cattle.[258]

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[254] M. Collard and F. Hunter, 'A Roman burial from Cramond', *PSAS* 130 (2000), 525-35, at 531-2.

[255] K. Forsyth, '*Hic Memoria Perpetua*: The Early Inscribed Stones of Southern Scotland in Context' in S. M. Foster and M. Cross (eds.), *Able Minds and Practised Hands: Scotland's Early Medieval Sculpture in the Twenty-First Century* (Leeds, 2005), pp. 113-34, at pp. 117-19: see Ch. 5.

[256] *Vita Wilfridi*, §36, §38.

[257] See the various entries for 'Ynys' in Owen and Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales*, pp. 499-502.

[258] R. B. K. Stevenson, 'The Nuclear Fort of Dalmahoy, Midlothian, and other Dark Age Capitals', *PSAS* 83 (1948-49), 186-98.

Bernician control over *Inbroninis* and *Dinbaer* was probably the result of undocumented political developments of the sixth and seventh centuries, whereby Anglian power extended beyond the Tweed after the capture of Bamburgh in the mid-sixth century. Below the Tweed there are several power centres which perhaps indicate the division of Votadinian territory as proposed for the Roman period. Again, these sites have names of Brythonic derivation: *Din Guaire* (Bamburgh), *Ad Gefrin* (Yeavering), and *Maelmin*.[259] The latter site did not apparently come into use until the demise of *Ad Gefrin*, although the Brythonic name was entrenched enough to pass into Anglian usage. Yeavering, a Bernician royal centre which stands on the banks of the river Glen, at the edges of the Cheviot Hills, has been seen as 'the definitive archaeological expression of the architecture of early medieval kingship in England'.[260] Here, according to the Hope-Taylor's innovative thesis, the builders harnessed various cultural traditions, local, Roman and North Sea as a statement of a 'vigorous hybrid culture', where an Anglian or Anglicised elite ruled a substantial Brittonic population.[261] Hope-Taylor proposed an evolution of building styles through five phases. Style I was a native form without 'Anglo-Saxon influence', preceding Style II, the 'Yeavering style', which was a fusion of local, British and Germanic techniques, culminating in the construction of the Great Halls of Style IIIC.[262] Moreover, the Great Enclosure, used for the mustering of local herds for periodic markets or festivals, was assigned by Hope-Taylor to a northern tradition of palisade-enclosures, seen at Hownam Rings (Roxburghshire) and Hayhope Knowe (Roxburghshire).[263] Overall, Hope-Taylor argued for native regional traditions of palisade construction which continued to influence building styles at the site,

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[259] Alcock, *Kings and Warriors*, p. 236.

[260] C. O'Brien, 'Yeavering and Bernician Kingship: A Review of Debate on the Hybrid Culture Thesis', in Petts and Turner, *Early Medieval Northumbria*, pp. 207-220, at p. 207.

[261] B. Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering: An Anglo-British Centre of Early Northumbria* (London, 1977), pp. 267, 282.

[262] Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering*, pp. 154-8.

[263] Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering*, pp. 205-9.

which merged with Germanic techniques to form a hybrid style; Yeavering itself continuing to function as a regional assembly site. Doubts have been raised, however, over Style 1's supposed native affinities.[264] Christopher Scull, for example, has argued that the Style I buildings (A5 and D2) derive from an Anglian cultural context, dated to the mid-sixth century and are the direct antecedent of the Bernician *uilla regalis*.[265] Debate thus remains about the precursor of Anglian *Ad Gefrin* and its possible status as a British political centre. However, Alcock regards Yeavering as one amongst a number of northern British sites taken over by the Bernicii in the course of the seventh century.[266] And O'Brien has proposed the shire of *Gefrin* around the Rivers Till and Glen with the *uilla regalis* at its centre to be a pre-Anglian political unit.[267] Perhaps the presence of 'Eccles Cairn', situated in the Cheviots near Kirk Yetholm, surrounded by an ancestral landscape of hillforts and tumuli which lies within easy reach of Yeavering provides another clue that secular British power once resided at *Ad Gefrin*.

It is nonetheless important that amongst the cultural elements utilised by the planners of Yeavering was the construction of an auditorium (building E).[268] The auditorium consisted of concentric arcs of circles, seating for around 320 person before whom sat on a dais the king, backed by a standing post, interpreted as a Frankish *staffolus*, a ceremonial object from

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[264] R. Miket, 'A Restatement of Evidence from Bernician Anglo-Saxon Burials', in P. Rahtz, T. Dickinson and L. Watts (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries, 1979: The Fourth Anglo-Saxon Symposium at Oxford*, BAR Brit. Ser. 82 (Oxford, 1982), pp. 289-305, at p. 303; R. Cramp, 'Anglo-Saxon Settlement', in J. C. Chapman and H. C. Mytum (eds.), *Settlement in North Britain 1000 BC-AD 1000* BAR Brit. Ser. 118 (Oxford, 1983), pp. 263-97, at p. 274.

[265] C. Scull, 'Post-Roman Phase I at Yeavering: A Reconsideration', *MA* 35 (1991), 51-63.

[266] Alcock, *Kings and Warriors*, pp. 233-35.

[267] C. O'Brien, 'The Early Medieval Shires of Yeavering, Breamish and Bamburgh', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 30 (2002), 53-73, at 58-63.

[268] Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering*, pp. 119-22, 241-44.

where Frankish kings pronounced their judgments.[269] This was in use during Yeavering's apogee, that is, during the early to mid-seventh century. Theatres were places of provincial assembly in the Roman world and here the ruler of *Ad Gefrin* can be seen to be claiming links with the imperial past, or rather asserting imperial claims in the present, a development which elides with our understanding of kingship amongst the Deiri and Bernicii drawn from Bede. Royal ethnic identity was a composite consisting of several elements, one of which was assertions of imperial power;[270] indeed, this was appropriate for kings who possessed hegemony over multiple peoples.

Conclusion

We have been concerned here to examine the transformation of identity across the north British zone between 300 and 700. This area contained *provincia* and *barbaricum* in the late Roman period; consequently the groups inside this zone constituted *civitates*, the Roman military and intramural groups, frontier barbarians who nevertheless regarded themselves and were viewed by others as Britons. The first point to be emphasised is that the groups which emerged in this period were not simple continuations of earlier peoples, whether civilian, military or barbarian. Roman occupation of the north had major consequences for peoples of the northern frontier zone and while the *civitas* system preserved or created indigenous regional identities, these did not survive the ending of Roman Britain; indeed, it is possible that regions such as Deira, *Catraeth* and Elmet emerged in a late Roman context. However, the politicisation of these regions was influenced to a large extent by expressions of Roman authority, which overlay and transformed earlier *civitas* identities. Similar process were at

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[269] P. Barnwell, 'Anglian Yeavering: A continental perspective', in P. Frodsham and C. O'Brien (eds.), *Yeavering: People, Power and Place* (Stroud, 2005), pp. 174-84, at 179-82.

[270] Cf. W. Filmer-Sankey, 'The "Roman Emperor" in the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 149 (1996), 1-6.

work amongst the *limitanei*; of course, identity amongst the soldiery was already expressed through Roman ideals, though here localisation occurred with increased use of symbols and material culture drawn from the frontier zone itself.

As for the intramural peoples, these groups were forming under diplomatic and military pressure through the fourth century and arguably represent the greatest form of continuity in terms of group identities between the Roman and early medieval periods. Here, these groups established themselves as friends *and* enemies of the Roman provinces: sometimes hostile; sometimes peaceful, as we should expect from barbarian societies and the dynamics which affected their internal workings. But it was their reinterpretation of the ancestral past and their current manipulation of material culture which defined the identities of these groups. While all were warrior groupings which depended on the loyalty between *teyrn* and *teulu*, the intramural groupings presented themselves as the heirs to imperial authority, as did those groups further to the south in the old civilian zone. This process is perhaps obscured from us through approaching these kingship groups through the lens of early Welsh poetry and its associated traditions. However, it remains likely that the Britons of North regarded themselves, perhaps in competition with the Anglian Deiri and Bernicii, as the upholders of Roman authority in the post-Roman northern frontier zone.

<center>Conclusion</center>

The Britons of western and northern Britain occupied an interesting position amongst the inhabitants of Roman and early medieval Europe. In eastern and southern *Britannia*, Brittonic communities that remained eventually adopted Anglo-Saxon cultural and speech. By contrast, the Britons further west and north, in the provinces of *Britannia Prima* and *Britannia Secunda*, unlike their fellow-citizens to the east or other contemporaneous (former) imperial peoples such as the Gauls, managed to weather the storm created by the collapse of the western Roman Empire and retain their territory in face of barbarian Germanic incursions. Nonetheless, in this period of political, cultural and ethnic transformation the Britons also underwent transformations from being an, albeit marginal, imperial people to a *gens* of early medieval Europe. Despite this, Britishness by the fifth century had a long pedigree as an identity. When the writings of earlier Roman observers such as Caesar and Tacitus are taken into account, Britishness can be argued to have existed as an identity in the earliest period of imperial contact with the island, during which its inhabitants were incorporated into the Roman Empire. However, the apparent survival of the *Britanni* as a socio-political and cultural entity across and beyond the Roman period sometimes results in modern scholarship taking for granted the existence of this group: that is, 'the Britons' as a *gens* or *natio* are considered to have always existed and continued to do so despite enormous changes that took place in the Roman and late antique periods which affected ideas and expressions of identity and political authority.

This study has sought to problematize this issue. Rather than viewing the *Britanni* as a static entity that persisted unchanging across the Roman and immediately post-Roman period, it has argued that Britishness, like other 'ethnic' and regional identities of our period, were very much the creation of time, circumstance and literary endeavours. That is, the creation of

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Britishness was a process engendered primarily through two interrelated mechanisms. Roman and later authors such as Gildas sought to organise and influence the regional groups subsumed under the universal ethnic label *Britanni* through the creation of a set of characteristics and traits which differentiated this people – to a lesser or greater degree – from other groups. These observations functioned in external or internal contexts – that is, literary discourse concerned with a particular group, in this case the Britons, was disseminated primarily for one of two purposes: first, it could be deployed as a method by which external observers categorised disparate groups under one particular label for their own agenda; or, second, as a mean by which authors internal to the group they identified with, such as Gildas, strove to promote that identity by addressing sub-groups identified as belonging the wider entity.

As argued throughout the thesis, Britishness was not a natural identity adhered to by the majority of the island's inhabitants. In order for this identity to be successful and continue as a unit of social reproduction, the second mechanism which engendered the creation of Britishness had to be validated by the people labelled as Britons. That is, regional groups had to recognise, accept and participate in the validity of the label *Britanni* and acknowledge that in some respects Britishness – however so defined – both united regional identities and differentiated them on a broader scale from other large-scale population units or *gentes*. In order that such an identity would retain its potency over time and space, the necessary political and cultural context was crucial. Identities often had to be contrasted and constructed against a competing or opposing identity for them to sustain their vitality; and they have to be provided with a setting in which their articulation took on significance, either in a positive or negative manner. Ethnic British identity was, then, externally imposed and internally validated.

From an ethnographic, literary perspective, Britishness was undeniably a Roman construct; it was continental authors, some of whom never set foot within the island, who established the characteristics of Britishness. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the products of Roman literary imaginings had an enormous effect throughout the empire on perceptions of the Britons, from the Greek east to the Gallic west, and into the very highest echelons of society: the imperial court. The dissemination of Caesar's *Gallic War* and the creation of imperial and 'private' propaganda, such as Tacitus' *Agricola*, which preceded and followed the Claudian conquest of AD 43 were hugely influential in creating a 'vision of *Britannia*'. Indeed, the conquest period was a defining epoch in the creation of Britishness; here the Britons as a *natio* or *gens* emerged in a literary context for the first time as a discernible group. Despite some saving graces applied in the late third- and early fourth-century panegyrics associated with the Constantinian dynasty, the image created of this people was almost entirely negative. Constructed in order to 'other' this society and provide justification for and legitimisation of the imperial conquest of the island and the enslavement of the people, the image of the Britons established within various literary genres, such as history and poetry, had a powerful legacy: the Britons were cowards; sexual deviants sometimes dominated politically by women; wearers of skins and furs; and eaters of meat and drinkers of milk. The Britons, then, were notorious and their island represented both a physical and cognitive extreme, highlighted by the real and imagined distance between the imperial court and this peripheral province/diocese. Situated at the 'ends of the earth', far from the Mediterranean political and cultural core, Britain symbolised the extremities of empire both in real and figurative terms.

The definition of the Britons as a barbaric people was problematic for the inhabitants of the island province: Roman ethnography had created this 'truth' by focussing its endeavours on the Britons of the far north, known by the third century as Maeatae and

Caledonii. These peoples, targets of imperial campaigns under the emperor Severus, lived free of the Roman yoke; consequently the characteristics allegedly exhibited by these groups, listed by Cassius Dio, fulfilled the criteria demanded in narratives concerned with clashes between Romans and barbarians beyond the imperial frontiers. Indeed, the Tacitean tradition had established the boundaries of imperial and barbarian territories with the Forth-Clyde line given as a *terminus* between conquered and unconquered. Thus while between Caesar and Dio the Britons had remained in ethnographic terms essentially static, Britishness was now firmly fixed in the far north of *Britannia* and the prominence of the Caledonii remained an important part of Roman 'reporting' on Britain into the fourth and fifth centuries. Centuries after the regional communities of central and southern Britain had been incorporated into the empire, Roman disinclination to conquer the island in its entirety resulted in the island being characterised as an island inhabited by a barbaric, hostile population. Perceptions of Britain's volatile and barbaric nature were further emphasised as the island became enmeshed within the wider politics of empire: the emergence from the third century onwards of *tyranni* within the island, the majority of whom were unsuccessful, created an atmosphere of noxious contempt within imperial circles, particularly at the Honorian court in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

Of course, for wider Roman society the ambiguity between *provincia* and *barbaricum* in Britain was of little, if indeed any, relevance; and Britain's reputation as the originator of various failed rebellions did not result in the emergence of a sympathetic attitude towards the Britons amongst other provincial communities. Britain and the Britons were, in some senses, marginal to the Roman Empire. For the ethnographically invisible provincial population, one major element which affected their opportunities for full participation and integration within the imperial state was sharing an ethnonym with barbaric Britons of the far north. As explored in chapters 2 and 3, the provincial population laboured against ingrained prejudices

towards the Britons evident in continental circles to secure themselves an identity within the imperial framework. Acquisition of citizenship, the creation of territorial, provincial/diocesan Britain and the eventual ethnic differentiation between *Britanni* and *Picti* provided the circumstances under which the provincial population of Roman Britain could create for themselves an identity as an imperial people.

The third and fourth centuries were fundamental to the creation of insular, provincial Britishness: the demarcation of Roman territory, the advent of the Pictish terminology and the Britons' acquisition of citizenship meant that the provincial Britons could categorically distinguish themselves from the extramural barbarians. It must also be recognised that between the visit of Severus to the island between 208 and 211 and Constantius' liberation of Britain in the late third century no campaign had been led against the barbaric Britons; indeed, the panegyrics celebrating Constantius' victory present the Britons, somewhat uniquely, as an imperial people welcomed back into the fold rather than a barbaric rabble confronted by an imperial army. However, placed within the wider circumstance of their position as a provincial community, the peripheral status of Britain and its geographical and cognitive distance from the imperial court meant that Britons never achieved positions within Roman society attained by their counterparts in Gaul and elsewhere. To a large extent, this must be the result of the infrequent visits of the imperial court to Britain, a circumstance which prevented the rise of a fully integrated imperial aristocracy.

Prior to the Roman invasion and conquest the notion of a wider, British ethnic identity amongst the peoples of Britain was probably of only limited importance. Indeed, regional and political identities may have spanned the narrow sea between Britain and the continent: the notion of an 'island people' had probably not yet begun to form in the minds of contemporaries. As argued in chapters 2 and 3, the idea of an island province was the product

of Roman imperialism and ethnographic definition. As argued in chapters 5, 6 and 7, local or regional political and social affiliations remained important within Britain and at the forefront of identities from the time of the Caesarean incursions and Claudian conquest, through the imperial centuries and into the post-Roman period of the fifth and sixth centuries. Great variations existed within this matrix of regional identities. Some were consolidated around kingships such as that found in southern Britain at the time of the Claudian conquest; or, in the post-Roman period, the kingships of early medieval western and northern Britain. On the other hand, as discussed in chapter 5, regional identities in the Roman period were sometimes expressed through acts of imperial piety or 'normal' manifestations of Roman behaviour, whether burial, inscription or architectural munificence.

The importance of regionalism, a matter returned to below, thus suggests that Britishness as a supranational identity was, in the words of Benedict Anderson, an 'imagined community'. That is, it required active participation on the part of relatively widely dispersed individuals and groups to consider themselves part of a broader community based upon common descent, territorial location and involvement with the same socio-political body: in this case, the Roman Empire. It cannot be stressed enough that key to the emergence of Roman period Britishness was the Britons' acquisition of citizenship: this not only gave the Britons a means of locating themselves within the wider Roman world but it successfully differentiated them from the peoples of the far north, who were now termed *Picti*. It is perhaps reasonable to suggest that their historical experience as an imperial people had given some communities in Roman Britain a sense of themselves as being the *Britanni*, a provincial/ethnic group who validated themselves through a relationship with the empire. However, as argued in the latter stages of chapter 3, British identity was under threat in the eastern portions of the Roman diocese as links with the empire were slowly severed and new

identities emerged to challenge the relevancy and potency of both Britishness and regional *civitas* identities.

Fifth- and sixth-century political developments within (former) Roman Britain, indeed, involved a transformation of identities, particularly in the east of the island. Here, the creation of new communities can be explained in terms of ethnogenesis theory as championed by scholars such as Walter Pohl and Herwig Wolfram. This model has been applied to the Britons, though in general their transition is noted to be markedly different to circumstances elsewhere in the former western provinces. In many respects, this derives from the Briton's position, at least those in the west and north of the former diocese, as a people who were not subsumed within a Romano-Germanic kingdom. Nonetheless, circumstances amongst the Britons as a whole and, as shown in chapters 5, 6 and 7, amongst regional groups in western and northern Britain, correspond to developments on the continent in that the late antique period was defined by transformations in political and cultural identities.

We must, indeed, acknowledge that the circumstances of the late antique period were key to the creation of early medieval British identity – that is, Britishness, like other early medieval ethnicities, Frankish, Gothic and so forth, were a product of that age rather than a simple continuation of embedded, natural identities. The tumultuous changes which indeed took place in the fifth century demanded that Britishness be remade unless it fail, as had happened in the east of the island. Historical writing appears to have been fundamental to the process of creating large-scale ethnic identities amongst the peoples of early medieval Europe. Indeed, this intrinsically important aspect of a community's identity can also be recognised amongst the Britons. As explored in chapter 4, the *De Excidio Britanniae* of Gildas was fundamental to the (re)construction of Britishness. The writings of Gildas, for our purposes, represent the 'other side of the coin' in that they provide an internal perspective on

what it meant to be a Briton. Gildas's work illustrates that at least one individual was concerned with the wider function and relevance of British identity; indeed, it is reasonably clear from the message contained within the *DEB* that Gildas feared Britishness would lapse if his contemporaries neglected their wider responsibilities to their *patria* and participated in being British.

Gildas's narrative section, though brief, was an exercise in postcolonial historical discourse. Indeed, elucidation of the Briton's relationship with the Romans was fundamental to the message promulgated in the pages of the *DEB*. However large the Romans loom in the historical sections of Gildas's *epistola*, their influence on Britain, even at what scholars now understand to have been the height of imperial rule, was, for Gildas, one of political control rather than settlement. Indeed, this is perhaps one of the key points to take from Gildas: the Romans did not settle in the island; only with the Pictish and later Saxon incursions did foreign *gentes* finally inhabit Britain's shores. Just as Roman period Britishness had formed in contradistinction to the barbaric peoples of the far north, Gildasian Britishness was contrasted with other contemporary peoples: Picts, Saxons and, indeed, Romans. Differentiation from these groups took place on a number of different levels, both negative and positive. Although the line of transmission is obscure, Gildas appears to have inherited some of the views of the Britons, such as the uselessness in war, prevalent in Roman panegyric and historical writing.

This should perhaps occasion no surprise, for in cultural and educational terms Gildas was steeped in late antique *romanitas*. Indeed, it is possible to trace the impact and legacy, sometimes only in outline, of Roman ethnographical and historiographical visions of *Britannia* in Gildas's writing. In particular, Gildas's definition of Britain as an island, with reduced British territory being demarcated by the northern Walls, appears to owe something

to Roman historical writings and, perhaps, the inherited experience of late Roman provincial communities. Perhaps of greater importance was the legacy apparent in Gildas's work of socio-political developments introduced to the Britons in the course of the Roman period. In particular, Gildas's utilisation of citizenship to define contemporary British identity owes its very significance to the events of AD 212, as discussed in Chapter 2. As argued in chapter 4, however, Gildas was no Roman and Gildasian citizenship was not an articulation of membership within a wider body of citizens with affiliations to the Roman state; indeed, Gildasian citizenship, unlike Patrick's fifth-century conception, did not link the indigenous inhabitants of Britain to a wider Christian community in Gaul or elsewhere. Rather Gildas's citizenship granted exclusivity to his fellow countrymen, mirrored in his definition of Britain as the latter-day Israel. In his favouring of the terms *populus* and *cives*, Gildas attempted to stimulate cohesion amongst his target audience by stressing their commonalties and exclusiveness based upon shared experience, religion, citizenship and indigenous inhabitation of Britain. It was this remaking of Britishness which had an enduring effect throughout the early middle ages, and indeed beyond.

Britishness, then, like other large-scale identities, required contradistinction for it to take on a wider significance amongst the varying regional population grouped together under this ethnic label. Indeed, whether in Roman or early medieval Britain, Britishness existed in a world where regionalism stood at the forefront of socio-political identities. Nonetheless, as argued in chapters 5, 6 and 7, there were similarities between smaller-scale regional or kingship identities and large-scale ethnic identities: both were social constructs which required active engagement and participation for their continuing vitality. The extent to which the regional groupings noted in the Roman sources existed as social units prior to the Roman conquest is a matter of debate. However, there can be little doubt that the experience of Roman rule had a determining effect on their longevity by establishing them as *civitates*

within a broader provincial and, by the fourth century, diocesan framework. As discussed in chapter 5, *civitas* affiliation was sometimes expressed in an epigraphic context, with both individuals and groups announcing their identity as part of a particular cantonal group. On the whole, such practice, on the occasions when it did take place, occurred beyond the individual's homeland as an expression of belonging recorded in death. Interestingly, the surviving epigraphic evidence indicates that women were most often commemorated in this fashion, at least in the Roman period. When the epigraphic habit returns to prominence in the fifth and sixth centuries, it appears to be men who are most often referred to as belonging or hailing from a certain district or region. This was not the usual practice, however. As shown in the latter section of chapter 5, more often than not the deceased appeared without reference to their origin; rather the concern of commemorators in the post-Roman period was to establish territorial rights over land by stressing the ancestry of an individual rather than their region of birth.

Other forms of creating regional identities undoubtedly existed amongst and within the numerous Romano-British *civitates*. One method, as discussed also in chapter 5, appears to have been to assert membership of a regional community through shared artistic and cultural values, seen particularly in the distribution of regional mosaic styles in the *civitates* of eastern *Britannia Prima*. Although this suggests that regional *civitas* identities were the preserve of the noble or wealthy classes, the epigraphic evidence offsets this bias by revealing that individuals further down the social scale also identified with the homeland. In the upland regions of Roman Britain, where villas were rare or non-existent, other forms of activity would have been necessary to reproduce *civitas* identities as social units. This activity is less visible to us; however, the commemoration of Corbalengus the Ordovician in the fifth century testifies to the success and vitality of upland identities.

In whatever form social reproduction took place, a thread connected the expression of regional identities between the Roman and early medieval periods. Just as with ethnic British identity, it was citizenship that provided one of the defining elements of regional Brittonic identities. Whether declaring membership of a Romano-British canton such as the Cornovii or Dobunni, or stressing one's status as a member of regional elite in an emergent kingdom, citizenship acted as a method to distinguish a person on the basis of their regional identity. However, there may have been changes in the manner in which citizenship was deployed: regional *civitas* citizenship may have been available to a broader slice of the cantonal community, while early medieval citizenship may have evoked a more exalted status and membership of a political elite.

In the late and post-Roman periods, a new form of cohesiveness emerged through which group or regional identities were expressed: kingship. It must be reiterated here that the origins of kingship amongst the Britons of the west and north were not predicated on some deep-seated ideas about rulership existing amongst local communities who had had little contact with the Roman world; indeed, the very opposite was the case. While it is certainly correct that upland elites were less integrated into the Roman social and cultural norms than their lowland counterparts, perhaps having less responsibility for matters such as taxation or general participation in the administration and governance of the provinces, the impact and influence of the Roman authorities on these communities was no less dramatic or far-reaching. Indeed, as argued in chapters 6 and 7, interaction with imperial authorities created and bolstered the power of specific individuals and kindreds in the upland regions, stimulated by the use of certain imported material cultures and formulated on representations of militarised *romanitas*. Although the creation of elites was perhaps more easily formulated in the upland regions, with gulfs in wealth not as apparent as in lowland *civitates* with their ostentatious villas, emphasis on connections with the Roman state was no less fundamental.

In fact, it is possible to suggest that the upland elite were no less dependent on a relationship with the Roman state than the lowland elite; it was simply the case that the type of interaction differed between these groups. Whereas this relationship was sustained or renewed in an upland context over the course of the fifth and sixth centuries amongst the villa elite circumstance never returned to what they had been in the fourth century. Thus the patterns of political power in far western and northern Britain were, in some senses, similar: groups in Wales, southwest Britain and between the Walls were treated by the Roman authorities, whether in Britain or beyond, at various stages of their existence as frontier peoples. Thus, as argued in chapters 6 and 7, it was this periodic contact with the Roman state which allowed these emergent kingship groups to sustain and revitalize themselves across the late antique period.

Kingship amongst the Britons was thus a legacy of interaction with the Roman Empire. That said invocation of the ancestral past was vitally important in the creation and perpetuation of kingship amongst the early medieval Britons. Claims of authority over land and people were often articulated through residency at a prominent feature of the ancestral landscape: namely, hillforts. Whether or not these had witnessed occupation in the Roman period, their use suggests that individual rulers were anxious to harness the power of these monuments as legitimising symbols of their right to rule. Even then, with the emergence of new regional identities and kingship, power in the locality was reinforced by claims of early medieval rulers to be the rightful heirs to both the Empire and the ancestral past.

In final conclusion, a number of threads run through this study of identity and ethnicity amongst the Britons. First, that British ethnic identity was both the product of literary endeavour and the active participation of regional groups by acknowledging, in the Roman period, their place as an imperial people and subsequently their differences from other

peoples, whether the Pictish barbarians of the far north or the Saxons settled in the east of the island. Connecting British ethnicity and regional identities, as well as the Roman and early medieval periods, was the concept of citizenship. That this endured the ending of the Roman Britain and took one a broader importance in the post-Roman period is testament not only to the strength of regional affiliations across our period but, perhaps more importantly, to the integration of the Britons into the broader world of late antiquity.

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