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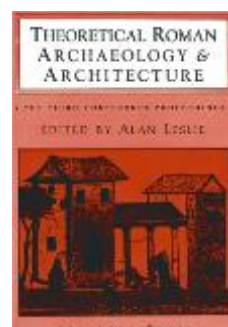# Adventus, patrocinium, and the urban landscape in late Roman Britain

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In *1980 Richard Reece published his paper* "Town and country: the end of Roman Britain" in which he claimed "in cruder terms, that the towns of Roman Britain had gone by 350" (Reece 1980, 77). Reece outlined a model that pictured organised civic life disintegrating in the third century and a more limited use of the town space by "Romanised" people petering out in the final quarter of the fourth century, if not before: fifth century occupation like that uncovered by Barker at Wroxeter or the *Grübenhäuser* from Canterbury was not of Roman character and therefore indicates reuse rather than continuity (op. cit., 84). The buildings of clearly "Roman" style present in the archaeological record of the fourth century at some towns are, Reece asserted, merely villas or farms, almost coincidentally situated within the redundant walls. Some administrative functions are admitted to be a possibility in a handful of cases but these are imagined to have been closer to early medieval royal structures in form than to those of a civic and bureaucratic classical state.

More recently Simon Esmonde Cleary (1989, esp. 64–85 and 131–161) has summarised the opposing views. Whilst admitting that examples of

public buildings going out of use can be found, at sites such as Wroxeter and Silchester, he asserts that they continue in primary use through the fourth century at at least as many other civic centres, if not at more (ibid., 71–72). Esmonde Cleary also points out that reuse of civic masonry in late defences is rare in Britain compared to Gaul, countering Reece's claim that French archaeologists have correctly identified a situation in the north of their country which also prevailed, unrecognised by modern archaeologists, in Britain (Reece 1980, 80). He does, however, concede that, apart from defensive works, no new civic building can be detected in the fourth century. His survey also indicates that there may well have been fewer "commercial" buildings, that is to say the well-known strip buildings, in fourth century towns than in those of the second century. The "day to day production and/or distribution of everyday goods such as leather-work, metalwork, pottery, textiles and woodwork" (Esmonde Cleary 1989, 75) are in evidence for the later period, but such activities are also in evidence from many rural sites and so may be ancillary to, rather the than cause of, residence. Esmonde Cleary's main argument is that relatively sophisticated town houses not only continue to exist in the fourth century but may well increase both in numbers and in importance. Finally he points to large sub-urban cemeteries as a sign of high urban population.

Esmonde Cleary agrees with Reece in saying that whatever is happening in the towns in the fifth century they are not, by and large, Roman. Indeed, as I understand it, the plea of his book is for archaeologists and historians alike to recognise that there is no transition between Roman Britain and Anglo-Saxon England; another, intermediary, society of independent Britons emerges and lasts for at least fifty years in the east of the country and for far longer over most of it. The disagreement comes, however, in the speed of transition. Reece claims that Britain was already becoming medieval by the late third century while Esmonde Cleary sees a fairly rapid disappearance of *romanitas* in the decades following 380. He does not claim that time stood still between the growth of Romano-British urbanism in the second century and the dread year of 410, but he sees the changes as relatively minor developments within an essentially antique milieu.

Given Reece's self-confessed penchant for controversy it might be argued that the differences between their stances are not so very different, but it is my intention to argue that whilst quite radical changes did take place through the duration of Romano-British history, changing the function of the civic centre fundamentally, the transition identified in the

archaeological record by Esmonde Cleary is indeed rapid, and is a result of the function of the city in the late empire.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN CIVIC BRITAIN: AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL

In order to understand the changing rôle of the civic centre in Romano-British society it is necessary to produce a brief narrative of evolutionary trends in the early first millennium in Britain. With deference to Reece (Reece 1988), what follows is "my Roman Britain".

The policy followed by the Romans for establishing an administrative framework for their growing empire, in the western provinces at least, was to offer the various polities they subdued and allied to themselves a republican constitution, modelled more or less closely on their own (see González 1986, for *Lex Irnicana*, the only western civic code extant). Thus the early empire was technically a league of Rome and a vast number of allied city states. In order to conform to this model an urban centre was established on a nodal point of the imperial road network. From an imperial perspective these centres would provide the contact point for tribute collection and for tendering additional contracts for the support of the superstructure: the army and the civil service.

In Britain the earliest phase of such "urban" development largely comprised administrative buildings, perhaps a bath house, and strip buildings. These last are supposedly commercial installations, but were possibly also used in the early phase for tribute collection. "Town houses", the residences of the local leadership, generally supposed to be the *curiales*, the councillors of the republic's assembly, only began to proliferate in most cities towards the middle of the second century. It should also be noted that prior to this the few villas in the countryside seem to be on a rather grand scale, and that these increase in number and decrease in grandeur alongside the proliferation of the town house.

The gift of a constitution does not make a republic overnight. In many cases the gift itself may have been quite slow in coming. The earliest handful of grand villas should probably be ascribed to a group we can call, rather clumsily, "contact period negotiators". This set might include tribal kings, war leaders, the sort of people Caesar refers to as "leading magistrates" and Quislings. For most of the first century, and indeed beyond, the imperial administration in Britain was largely military in nature, and campaigning of one sort or another was almost continuous. Allied British troops played a large part in these campaigns (although this is often ignored by modern commentators), and relationships be-

tween native élites and the imperial structure were probably forged as much under canvas or in the saddle as at the new civic centres.

From the mid-second to the mid-third century the republican ideal was probably as close to realisation as it would ever be. Local leaders competed for election to the council and support in other parts of the democratic processes (according to *Lex Irnicana* the citizen body had voting rights on certain issues such as the election of judges). In the civic centres they vied for the attention of provincial and central government officers as they passed through on their various rounds, hoping to win government supply contracts or to gain preferment for a kinsman or client or even some imperial honour for themselves.

In the countryside this period is characterised by the relatively widespread dissemination of "Roman" pottery types, such as Samian ware, which turn up on many of the so-called native farms, and is often the only indicator that the site is no longer in the Iron Age. Reece (1980, 86) and many others are happy to see this as a sign of a commercial boom with the "peasants" selling their wares at the civic centres, and later the small towns, and buying up imported goods. As Guy Bois (1992, 76–77) has recently pointed out, however, the civic centres of these antique *pagi* were far too widely spaced to have served any but a tiny minority of their citizens as a market place. In Britain, Lincoln and Leicester are fifty-one miles apart and Lands End is one hundred and twenty-three miles from Exeter. Even if we allow ourselves the luxury of adding the "small towns" of Roman Britain to this list we still cannot fill the gap adequately. As Bois correctly asserts, usefully spaced market towns are a product of the tenth century and later in most of western Europe. If, on the other hand, we allow ourselves to be convinced by the republican ideal, as I tend to be, then we might interpret this phenomenon as evidence of the establishment of a patron-client network in which pots (or perhaps primarily their contents?) were exchanged for popularity, support, and, ultimately, power. The *curiales*, actual or aspiring, owned town houses and villas, living primarily on the latter and visiting the town for curial functions and, importantly, for the visits of the civil governor, his officers, or military commanders.

The horizons and aspirations of most Britons at this period, even amongst the élites, probably extended little beyond their own individual republics. For them the civic centre was not just the symbol but also the source of empire. A major function of the town house may have been to convince visiting provincial and imperial functionaries of the status and sympathy of its owner. Those *curiales* who put on the most convincing

performance in the civic centre, probably the only part of most republics a governor would ever see, would win contracts and favours. These in turn could be used both to enrich himself and his immediate kinsmen and to reward his clients for their support. Success in the civic centre, however, was dependent upon attracting clients in the first place and this was the function of the villa. With its rectilinear plan, its plaster facing, and tiled roof, and no doubt many other features, the villa fulfilled the same function on a local scale as the town did in the republic as a whole. The self-evident *romanitas* of the villa was a symbol of the civic centre, which was, for most people, the empire. If we consider the empire as a potential source of power for the élites we can see the road network as a mains system, the civic centre as a wall socket, and the villa as the appliance. The villa signifies a man who has access to the ear of the governor, whose court of appeal annually toured the province, who might be able to secure tax concessions or to find a place in imperial service for one's son. Before the middle of the second century none of this had been necessary as the relationships of clientship, both between citizens and *curiales* and between *curiales* and the imperial officers, had been carried on in a military context. The demilitarisation of civic Britain, perhaps after the suppression of the Brigantian rebellion of c. 154 (Salway 1984, 199), had demanded the establishment of a new order in which citizenship was not wholly dependent on military capacity, nor public office on the qualities demanded by military leadership.

Reece, however, is correct to assert that in the third century the scene was changing. The paradox of Rome's republican gift to the *civitates* under its *imperium* lay in the fact that it had failed to rectify the social problems which had led to the disfunction of its own republic, indeed, it had taken them on board the establishment. Successful competition for access to external sources of wealth, in the case of Rome the spoils of war and "private diplomacy", and in the case of the British republics the patronage (including commercial opportunities) of imperial functionaries, led to a small number of families being able to gain a massive economic advantage over their fellows. Wealth accumulated in this way was invested in land and larger agricultural estates began to emerge. The maintenance of town houses in the civic centres was now dependent upon slave labour and the need of the most successful *curiales*, the *principales*, for clients declined. As a result of these changes imported goods ceased to reach the less-well-off households and they are henceforth harder to spot in the archaeological record.

In this way civic office and public service ceased to be the keys to con-

tinuing patronage from the provincial circuit, but the circuit itself had not declined in importance, indeed it was about to flower as it had never done before. The rise of large estates should not be overestimated. Some of the modern literature gives the impression, intentionally or not I am not sure, that the vast majority of the land in late Roman Britain was divided up between estates based on villas, and that all other rural settlements were occupied by tenants and *coloni*. I find this very difficult to believe. Esmonde Cleary, citing the work of Jean-Marie Carrié (1982, in Esmonde Cleary 1989, 29), firmly refutes the dominance of the *colonate* in the late antique west. The problem is, as Carrié says, historiographical, too many scholars wish to equate the fall of the Roman empire with the rise of feudalism (e.g. Wickham 1986). When all is said and done "the Roman empire" is just a name and its death is of no more consequence than that of Alexander. Those who see the empire as a system are misguided; it was an entity which utilised various systems in different places and times. Feudalism, as has been said many times, has too many meanings, but the one most often used in this context is that utilised by Marx which identifies the seigniorial *bán*, which reduced the peasantry to tied tenants owing both rent and services to a territorial lord, as the primary diagnostic. As many scholars, such as Guy Bois (1992) and Georges Duby (e.g. 1981), have recently asserted this "mode of production", if I may use that phrase, did not become the dominant mode, though it may well have existed before then, until the tenth and eleventh centuries, indeed Bois would like to see Finley's ancient economy (1973) persisting up until c. 1000. This may be going a bit far but I suspect that a distinct post-imperial phase may be required. *Coloni* existed, and their number almost certainly increased under the late empire, but they were probably never a major class presence in any landscape. The estates that grew up in Roman Britain, equally, put their owners far ahead of his fellow citizens but not over their heads in any legal sense, the bulk of land even in late Roman Britain was probably the allodial property of small holders and the result of this shift in balance was primarily to exclude them from the civic centres.

The Reece-Esmonde Cleary debate on the continued existence of towns in the fourth century centres on their function in society. Reece argued that they lost their social and economic rôle but may have retained their administrative rôle, Esmonde Cleary that things had changed only superficially. Perversely, I would claim that they retained their social and economic rôle but lost their administrative one. The archaeological evidence, put simply, shows a continuity of large town houses fairly widely

spaced, with a decline in the number of strip buildings, though not ne-
cessarily their disappearance, and, in some centres, the abandonment or
unorthodox use of civic buildings (for examples see Reece and Esmonde
Cleary, op. cit., or any of the standard texts on Roman Britain). My inter-
pretation is probably clear by now, but before I go any further let us turn
to another theme that has played a great part in assessing the decline of
the civic centres, the fate of the *decurionate*.

In his monumental work *The Later Roman Empire* (1964) A. H. M. Jones
dealt at great length with the decline of the *decurionate*, the curial order.
We are told by various sources that evasion of service was rife and we
know, even from as early as the *Lex Irnicana*, that *curiales* were em-
powered to conscript additional colleagues to the order in the event of no
candidates standing for election. The property qualification was gradu-
ally lowered to make up numbers as those families which had originally
supplied the *curiales* either became impoverished or gained exemption.[1]
The possibilities for exemption increased as time progressed due to a
gradual but far-reaching change in the structure of the empire. Since the
late republic it had been possible for the Roman state to award individual
allies with the honour of citizenship. Initially this was probably seen as
essentially honorific and in real terms meant that these new citizens were
treated more courteously by Roman officials and could appeal to Roman
magistrates, essentially provincial governors, if they felt unsatisfied with
the justice meted out to them in allied cities. Citizenship was hereditary,
however, and as time went by, and as the territory of the empire ex-
panded, a higher and higher proportion of Roman citizens were of allied
descent. Citizenship also carried with it the right to hold office within the
Roman state and so, as the military and civil services expanded to ad-
minister the growing empire, more and more men in more and more
important positions were of allied rather than Latin descent. From the
time of Marcus Aurelius (161–180) the number of grants of citizenship,
particularly in the west, where Romanisation was well under way
amongst the curial classes, increased enormously. In 212 Caracalla, him-
self of allied descent, extended the rights of citizenship to all free men
resident in the empire. Caracalla's edict in effect recognised officially
what had already taken place; the colonial empire of Rome had become a
territorial state of Romania.

In order to encourage the best of the allied citizenry to serve in the im-
perial service the late empire offered exemption from their native civic
duties for three generations to those appointed. Even a short commission
held such exemption and so service was avidly sought. The *adventus* of

the governor, high-ranking military officers, and, after the establishment of the tetrarchy, a caesar or an augustus in person, would have become an eagerly anticipated event. The local élites in our British republics would have invested even more in their individual urban facades in the quest for patronage, for now it meant not just the chance to compete more effectively against their colleagues and compatriots but to escape from that level of life altogether. Paradoxically those people who invested most in their urban image were the very same as those who were least willing to meet their civic costs; one might say that the town grew at the expense of the city. In addition to these wealthy types who rose above the demands of patriotism, Christian clerics were also, from the time of Constantine, exempt from the civic *munus* (though one can hardly imagine that this particular exemption had much effect on Britain). The fourth-century army was also restructured, service becoming hereditary, with those who survived receiving a small estate and exemption from tax and civic duties; if their patrilineage was able to survive for a generation or two even common soldiers might become significant men on a local scale. Since civic expenditure was largely paid for out of the pockets of magistrates and *curiales* the effective removal of large tracts of productive land from the civic sphere, once its owners gained exemption, must have had some effect upon the efficacy of civic government and justice.

Nick Higham (1992, 45) has succinctly summed up the resulting dilemma of the surviving *curiales* now under compulsion from the state and made corporately responsible for any shortfallings in tax payments or services. Those amongst the wealthy who could not immediately secure formal exemption might attempt to transfer their property to another republic where they were not under obligation, perhaps most safely in another province where they could not be informed against to the governor. Indeed, those seeking further imperial preferment may well have attempted to cluster their property in regions more likely to experience *adventus*. The clustering of villas around places like Trier on the continent, or Cirencester, capital of Britannia Prima and residence of the governor, may reflect such strategies, as may urban housing in such cities. The chances of such urban investment paying off were further increased by the practices of the new field army, the *praesentales* or *comitatenses*, who were better paid than the traditional legionaries and the contemporary *limitanei* and who were billeted in the towns through which they passed whilst on service (ibid., 45 and Jones 1964). Undoubtedly the most attractive residences would be allocated to the most senior officers and equally undoubtedly this would be an honour worth

competing for.

But what of the rural poor? What of those small allod holders who owned too little land to qualify for the *decurionate* even in the fourth century? I have already suggested that their support was no longer sought by the local élites so that they might be noticed by the imperial administrators. In consequence the gifts of imported and industrially manufactured goods ceased to flow into their households, which consequently become much harder for archaeologists to find on the ground. Without this hold on the *curiales* and magistrates the only way these *humiliores* could have ensured support in civic or judicial proceedings would have been to seek out patronage through offering voluntary tribute to *curiales* or local *principales* who might exert pressure upon the magistrates.

Such a course, almost certainly, was the road to the *colonate*; already over taxed the expense of such gifts might prove ruinous to the fragile economy of the small allod holder. As it was, social and demographic pressures may have been eroding his position in any case. Several generations of *pax romana* must have led to the increasing sub-division of allods through partiple inheritance. This was perhaps compounded by the institution of a recruitment tax, which consortia of local *honestiores* could pay to keep army recruiters out of the district (Jones 1964, 615–616). In the pre-Roman and early colonial period military service and endemic warfare must have ensured that many sons did not return to the patrimony and that those who did married later, thus ensuring that there would be fewer mouths to feed (early marriage leads to more individuals and a greater number of generations coexisting within one household). A similar crisis developed in the West Highlands and Islands of Scotland during demilitarisation from the early seventeenth to the late eighteenth century. One result in Scotland was increased nucleation of settlement, which minimised the destruction of agricultural land and allowed for easy labour cooperation between close kinsmen. A second result was the expansion of spade tillage which allowed unploughable marginal land to be put under cultivation (Dodgshon 1992). One wonders whether either of these two processes might be visible in the archaeological record from late Roman Britain; unfortunately the dating of rural sites with no imported pottery and no coinage is exceedingly difficult.

And what of the judicial and civic needs of those small allod holders who were not prepared or constrained through proximity to beggar themselves to the *honestiores*? The most likely course for them to have taken would have been to retreat from civic activity altogether and to fall

back on local courts. We know these existed and that the *civitas* territories were sub-divided into local districts (Salway 1984, 534–535) even though we have very little precise information about them. An idea of how they might have appeared and worked can be gained from Wendy Davies' *Small Worlds* (1988), an excellent study of the *plebes* surrounding the abbey of Redon, in eastern Brittany, in the ninth century. Place-name evidence suggests that such *plebes* existed in Dumnonia also and they may be a Romano-British institution, but even without demanding a relationship of descent we might still see their context as analogous to that which we seek in fourth-century Britain. These small locales seem to have averaged 40–50 square kilometres in extent, though with great variation in individual cases, with a distance of between six and seven kilometres between their *foci*, in other words an hour's walk across (ibid., 64–65).

> Disputes concerning property in the *plebs* would be heard before the *plebenses* and settled locally, either formally under the presidency of a *machtiern* or a ruler's representative, or informally; local people served as judgement finders in formal cases and their evidence as impartial witnesses might be taken. Local matters were almost invariably settled by the community, and it is perfectly clear that a strong sense of community might be evidenced in such proceedings, and a conscious one.

The *machtiern* mentioned in Davies account (whose title means "surety lord"), was a local big landholder whose relationship to the *plebs* was nevertheless that of *patrone* rather than *seignior* and any "gift" presented in gratitude for his participation would be donated on behalf of the *plebs* as a whole rather than by one or other of the litigants. Such civil divisions seem to have existed elsewhere in early medieval Gaul where they where known variously as *agri* and *vicariae*. Although even the estates of *nobiles* technically lay within these territories, or even across them, there seems to have been a process of self-selection whereby the rich attended the count's court and the poor the local assembly. The presence of a *patrone* seems in no sense to have been a requisite for such courts and the *maiores* and *vicari* who generally presided seem to have been local goodmen. With the obvious substitution of the civic magistrates or governor for the count, I would strongly suggest that this kind of institution should be traced back to late Roman times if not to a much earlier age.

Why small allod holders should resist the appeal of the *colonate*, which may well have offered greater security than their own precarious economy might provide, is probably to be answered by the social value of

land ownership in pre-capitalist societies and the honour and status that an allod holder retains, however humble his material condition. One symptom that may develop from this poverty is the need for the poor man to distinguish himself visibly from the *colonus* and even the *casatus*, who may well be his material superiors or at least equals. A visible and portable sign of his freedom that he could have to hand at assemblies and on other public occasions that would ensure his claim to being free is what he required. In short, a weapon.

Lex Julia forbade the carriage of arms on the public highway, but not their possession. Brent Shaw (1984) in his discussion of banditry in the empire makes it quite clear that weapons were available to those who felt the need for them, and Wolf Liebeschuetz (1991, 231–232) has pointed to Synesius of Cyrene's purchase of weapons on the market, and domestic manufacture of others, in order to arm his private militia. Going back to the second century it is hard to imagine a complete disarming of the British soldiery, and by the end of the third century, if not earlier, barbarian raids were a distinct possibility in many areas. This is not to suggest that Roman Britain was bristling with armed men, at least not before the fourth century, but the parallel could be drawn perhaps with Ireland over the last century, and other areas, such as the Balkans, in which paramilitary activity has been recurrent, where weapons will often go "under the floor-boards" for years, and sometimes decades, when the owner feels that they are no longer necessary but seeks the reassurance of their presence against the eventuality that circumstances may change.

With the increasing constraints on their access to civic justice the *plebenses* may at times, particularly if in dispute with an inhabitant of a neighbouring plebs (rather than of their own), have had to resort to the exercise of distraint backed up with force. While it is not the place here to discuss the continental phenomenon of *bacaudae* at any length, the gradual transition of the society of the rural poor to one dependent upon the exercise of distraint, with its constant shadow the bloodfeud, may well provide a background for the structures utilised by men like Tibatto in their "uprisings". It is a well-known feature of feuding societies that conditions occasionally lead to private vendettas escalating to a scale difficult to distinguish from political activity (see Byock 1982; Wormald 1981; and Hopwood 1990). In Britain there is little if any evidence for bacaudic activity (but then, to be frank, there is little evidence for anything at all), and it may never have become necessary. Dynamic leadership for those who wished to reach beyond the boundaries of the *plebs* may have been provided by the commanders of the North British raiding parties which

seem to have frequented the diocese throughout the period; linguistically and culturally very close to the *humiliores*, they may well have accumulated adherents as they rode heroically across a landscape devoid of the richer *romani*, who were doubtless either cowering behind the walls of their civic centres or eagerly handing over their silver and horses to the barbarians in order to save their beautiful villas from the torch.[2]

CONCLUSION

The reader may have been surprised when I, earlier, suggested an expansion of the rural population at this period when it is commonplace to claim a drastic reduction. My argument is that with the severing of the patron-client relationships between the local élites and the *humiliores*, the *plebenses*, the paradox emerged that whilst the population of western Europe grew so the population of the empire, as a social construct, declined. The regional élites supporting themselves on estates worked by slaves and some *coloni* had become, in effect, the bottom tier of the imperial structure, a structure based upon *patrocinium,* and the rural poor, the *plebenses*, lay outside it all together. In Britain recent environmental evidence, mostly palynological, has put paid to the idea of a late antique return to wilderness and may even suggest an increase in the land under cultivation (although as I have suggested this may not represent economic growth) during our period (Higham 1992, 77–80; also Whittaker 1976).

The élites whilst preferring, when possible, to enjoy the *otium* of their country estates, as evidenced by the wealth of those few villas that survived into the later fourth century, were dependent upon the patronage of emperors, counts, governors, and the like in order to enjoy it. As van Dam (1985) rightly states the *adventus* of the emperor or his senior representatives was the high point in provincial life. These *adventus* were urban events and to make the most of them the British élites must have maintained impressive urban establishments. The late Roman town house, set in its spacious gardens, was that establishment. We must not, however, assume that one house represents one aristocratic family.

Comites and their kind, let alone emperors, were rare visitors to fourth-century Britain and seldom stayed long. The full twenty-eight city tour was probably not an option. To ensure access to the potentate it was probably necessary to be prepared to anticipate his movements, and perhaps to maintain more than one town house. A rich Dobunnian, we might imagine, while idling most of his days hunting across the hills above his home at somewhere like Woodchester, may well have main-

tained houses at Gloucester, Cirencester, and Bath, and perhaps even one in the diocesan capital at London. The account of King Gunthchramn's *adventus* into Orleans at the beginning of Book Four of Gregory of Tours' *Historia Francorum* is instructive in its description of bishops and other notables gathered from all over western Gaul to enjoy his presence.

For most of the year, perhaps for years at a time in some cases, these houses may have housed only a handful of servants just as the strip buildings provided accommodation for plumbers, masons, brickmakers, and other artisans necessary for the up keep of the fabric. Esmonde Cleary (1989, 80–81) claims the evidence of the cemeteries at sites like Cirencester, Dorchester, and Winchester indicates a large permanent urban population, but I would urge caution on two counts. Firstly, we know of few rural cemeteries from this period so these are perhaps civic rather than urban burial grounds. Secondly, skeletal evidence suggests that there is an unusual sex ratio, with the number of males represented considerably outweighing the females in the sample; bearing in mind the rôle of urban sites as accommodation for *comitatenses* units this might be explained if a significant number of the burials are in fact soldiers or heads of household socialising with imperial officers (for sex ratios see Nelson 1985). The fourth-century town was, indeed, a different animal from the second-century town and in its difference lay the seeds of its destruction.

Esmonde Cleary clearly notes a rapid disappearance of "town life" in the first decades of the fifth century, very different from Reece's gradual decline, and he is right to do so. The urban landscape of later Roman Britain was the stage for the *adventus*, the set for the fawnings of the provincial élite, reduced to the status of clients, desperately trying to impress their masters into casting them the crumbs of patronage. After 409 there were no more emperors, no more counts, no more governors, no more patrons. The British élites still had their estates and in each of their republics made up a handful of local aristocrats but if they were to compete with one another for dominance under the new order they had to return to the only resource available to them, their own *patrocinium*, and the potential clients amongst the *plebenses*. The cities were empty shells and the emperor was gone, the villa that at one time had symbolised its owner's access to the source of power now only symbolised his emasculation. *Pax romana* was gone, barbarians filled the highways, protection and physical force was the new Rome. A new structuring of leadership, with a new assemblage of symbols was required if the oligarchy was to maintain its hegemony.

NOTES

1. Eventually the property qualification dropped to 25 *iugera*, about 7 hectares. Laid out as a block 7 ha would form a square with sides of 265 metres and would take approximately 10.5 minutes to circumperambulate. Three such "estates" could fit within the defences of the Iron-Age hillfort at Hod Hill, Dorset. The Bordeaux aristocrat Ausonius inherited a patrimony of 270 ha, which would have taken an hour and six minutes to walk around and could theoretically have provided the property qualification for 38 *curiales*. The property qualification was based upon land within the republic so it is just possible that *curiales* were not getting poorer but that men with estates on the scale of Ausonius were deliberately splitting their property between republics (we know for certain that Julius Ausonius, the poet's father, was on the curial list in two republics: Bordeaux and Bazas).
2. Sidonius Apollinaris' letter to Riothamus (Ep. III, ix) speaks of slaves being lured off their masters' estates, in the Auvergne(?), by British soldiers c. 470, and see also Wolfram Herwig's (1988) discussion of Gothic "ethnogenesis". On the social background of *bacaudae* I was willing to be convinced by Ray Van Dam's (1985) argument until my brother, Greg Woolf, pointed out the consistently and resoundingly Celtic names of their leaders, surely a sign of humble status better fitting the model of a divided society I present here. On another occasion I hope to be able to deal with Pictish "ethnogenesis".

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