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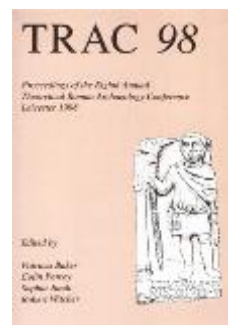
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Contact, Architectural Symbolism and the Negotiation of Cultural Identity in the Military Zone

by Simon Clarke

Introduction

The house is widely regarded by architects and anthropologists to be one of the key expressions of societies' self view. Built space physically defines different activity areas, both reflecting and helping to shape the pattern of everyday life (Rapoport 1990). In most pre-modern societies there is also a major symbolic element, architecture and lifestyle combining to encode complex cosmological ideas and value systems (cf. Parker-Pearson & Richards 1994) - the house embodies what Bourdieu has termed *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977:89). With this concept firmly in mind the paper will contrast the architecture of Roman period native settlement in the Newstead region with extramural occupation at the fort itself. From this, rather different underlying principals are suggested for each society and possible explanations for the relative lack of overt cultural interaction can be offered.

The scale and character of the communities

A number of theoretical and practical objections may be raised against such a direct comparison. Firstly it might be reasoned that the disparity between the two societies was too great for any useful conclusions to be drawn. One was a quasi-urban outpost of a world empire, completely dependent on outside support for its economic and social viability. The other was small scale, rural, indigenous and largely self-sufficient. Analysis is also complicated by the very different characters of the two archaeologies, most strikingly perhaps, the volume of data available. Even a limited excavation at a Roman fort will normally reveal substantial structural remains and a bewilderingly vast assemblage of artefacts and ecofacts. The material at most of the region's native sites is usually very sparse, allowing (or compelling) fantastically detailed consideration down to the level of individual sherds of pottery. With the rapid accumulation of a vertical sequence and the super-availability of closely datable finds, the phasing of Newstead fort can be (fairly) accurately placed in a historical context. Reference to particular years or campaigns is over-optimistic, but a resolution of a decade is often perfectly reasonable. In contrast there is no native history, and in the absence of 'exotic' Roman imports it is often difficult to date native sites even to a specific century. It is, therefore, not usually possible to be certain that occupation at a specific farmstead was exactly contemporary with that of the nearby Roman military base. For example samian recorded at the Red Rig native settlement enclosure (Jones *et al.* 1989) might have been deposited just before, during or some time after occupation at Newstead fort, a few hundred metres away. Nevertheless if Roman / native interaction is to be understood some simple comparisons must be attempted.

Having so far stressed the differences between native and Roman settlements, the first observation should be that there were some important similarities. In particular there was no great disparity in building technology. The typical strip-buildings at Newstead were comparable in construction materials, scale and division of space to native roundhouses. In both cases wood, daub and thatch were ubiquitous, ground plans ranged from approximately 20 to 120 square metres and one or two roomed structures predominated (Figure 1). It may be that both societies were constrained by similar resource availability and technological considerations.

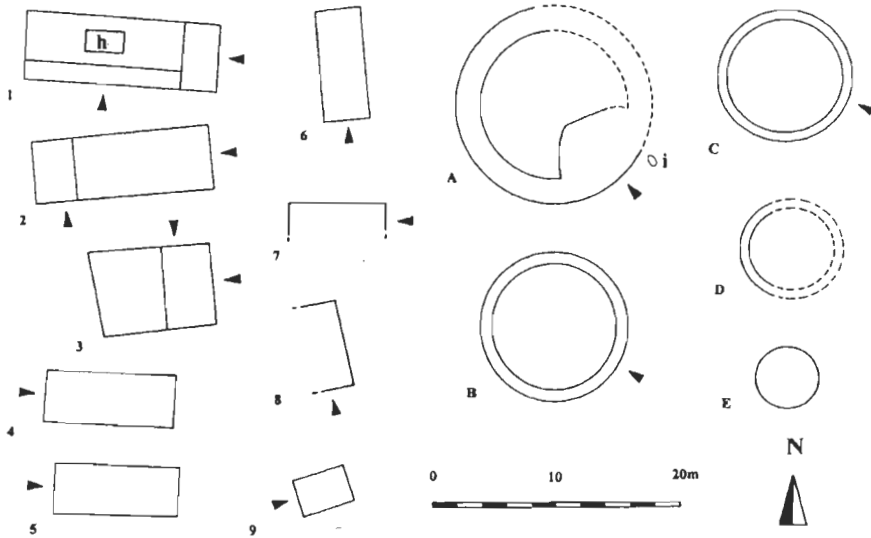


Figure 1. Comparison of Roman and Native Building Plans. Arrows indicate the position of probable doorways, *h* is a hearth or furnace and *i* a crouched inhumation burial. 1–9. Newstead South Annexe strip-buildings, ranked by area (after Clarke 1996). 1–F33/10, 2–F165/3, 3–F165/7, 4–F141/12, 5–F141/13, 6–F164/13, 7–33/9, 8–F33/12, 9–F141/15. A–E. Newstead Region native buildings, ranked by area (after Jones *et al.* 1992, 1993 and Dent *pers. comm.*). A–Whittrighill., B–Lilliesleaf North (geophysics), C–Clint Mains (geophysics), D–Bemersyde Hill., E–Coldshiels.

At first sight the extreme simplicity of the room plans in each case appears to imply comparable family or household structure, but this I think would be false. On native sites individual roundhouses were only one part of the households. The true social unit was probably the family compound, as defined by the settlements' enclosure ditches (Clarke 1998:30; Hingley 1989:59). Within the compounds excavation and survey frequently suggest the presence of quite a number of buildings, in the case of Clint Mains at least five (Jones *et al.* 1992). Although not all will have been contemporary, this suggests quite a complex division of space. In Newstead's annexes, while it is possible that family units occupied several neighbouring buildings, no fence lines or ditches have been discovered to suggest such groupings. Therefore, contrary to what might be expected typical household units associated with the *vicus* might actually have been smaller, with a lower degree of segregation and privacy, than was prevalent within the indigenous rural community.

Architectural distinction and cultural identity

The most striking difference between the two societies was the shape of the dwellings. At Newstead itself even the humblest, most peripheral buildings within the complex were without exception rectangular (cf. Clarke 1995:figures 8.8, 8.9). The architecture of the indigenous house on the other hand was exclusively curvilinear (Jones *et al.* 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993). This observation will excite no surprise whatsoever. However the almost total absence of exceptions to the rule, not only at Newstead, but more generally in the north, probably should [1]. It implies an extraordinary level of social conformity; indigenous society resolutely resisted innovation, whilst at the same time newcomers to fort communities showed a slavish devotion to this (admittedly basic) Roman fashion.

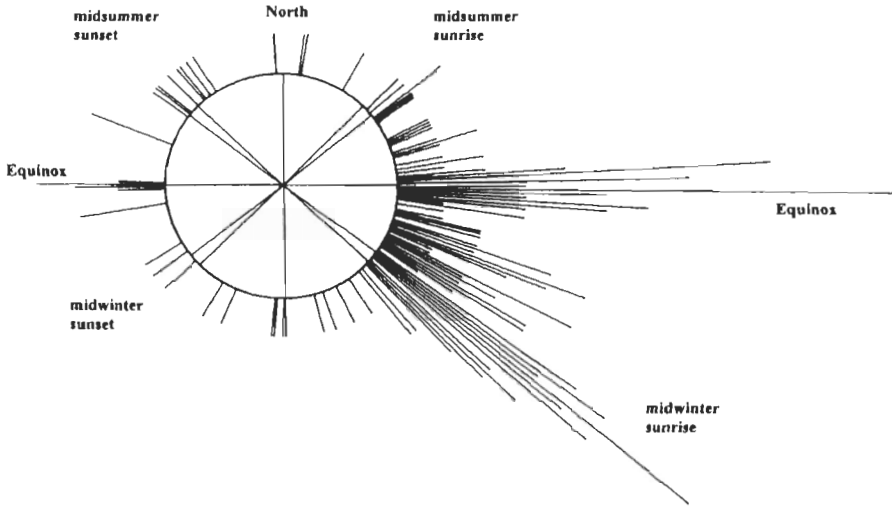


Figure 2. Doorway Orientation of Iron Age Roundhouses in Relation to the Cardinal Directions (after Oswald 1997).

Aspect	Number
North	4
North-east	10
east	9
south-east	14
south	5
south-west	17
west	5
north-west	5

Table 1: Slope aspect for enclosed settlement in the Newstead region [2]

Orientation	Number
North	0
north-east	6
east	16
south-east	13
south	1
south-west	3
west	1
north-west	1

Table 2: Entrance orientation for enclosed settlement in the Newstead region [3]

Another contrast was in the orientation and aspect of both buildings and settlements as a whole. The region's native settlements were clearly laid out primarily by reference to the natural environment. Elevated locations, with a roughly southern or eastern aspect were favoured (Table 1). There was a strong preference for enclosure entrances that opened to the north-east, east, or south-east (Table 2). The data set available for the Newstead region is not accurate enough for these observations to be conclusively interpreted. However, the work of others (particularly Oswald 1997) on building doorways strongly suggests similar bias for other late prehistoric British communities (Figure 2). Clearly the positioning of doors and gateways was not unconnected to practical expedients such as the need for light or shelter from prevailing winds. At the same time the pattern appears to have related to the symbolic importance of the sun's progress across the sky during significant periods in the year. For example the opposing east and west gateways at Lilliesleaf would have faced the rising and setting sun at the spring and autumn equinox. Similarly it is probably significant that the small number of known building doorways in the Newstead region all lay to the south-east (sunrise

at the winter solstice). The imperative of these astronomical alignments was so pronounced at some sites that structures appear strangely aloof from one another. At Whittrighill for example the doorway of the great roundhouse faced the nearby rampart rather than the settlement's entrance or centre. In this instance the probable ritual significance of the alignment was emphasised by the presence in the doorway of a flagstone surface of monumental scale and human burial (Jones *et al.* 1992).

The 'Roman' community at Newstead was ordered very differently, almost entirely by reference to the built environment. The fort itself was located and orientated primarily with reference to Dere Street, occupying a site just south of the bridge across the River Tweed. The extramural settlements were laid out according to the fort's gates and the approach roads. Across Britain as a whole, Sommer has demonstrated a trend in the location of fort's extramural settlement towards the projections of the *via Principalis* and *via Praetoria*, and away from the *via Decumana* (Figure 3), what might be thought of as the back entrance (Sommer 1984:43, fig. 22). The development history of Newstead's Annexes appears to follow this established pattern quite closely (Clarke 1996). The relative importance of the East and West Annexes altered markedly between the first and second centuries when the fort's orientation was reversed (Figure 4). The orientation of annexe gateways and aspect of the slope, if they mattered at all, were very minor considerations. Building alignment too was strikingly different to those on nearby rural sites. Rather than all facing in the same direction, buildings opened onto the road (Figure 5). This gave the settlement the impression of having been very inward looking, quite oblivious to the landscape it had intruded upon.

Clearly each community was conforming to well established norms, maintained out of a deep conservatism. If asked why things were done a certain way the most common answer would no doubt be 'because it always had been'. There is no reason to believe that people constantly dwelt on the symbolism behind their behaviour. Nevertheless I believe the architecture of fort and hinterland does suggest very different underlying priorities and concerns (Table 3).

	<i>Newstead Extramural Settlement</i>	<i>Rural Sites</i>
Building Materials	wood, daub and thatch	wood, daub and thatch
Building Size	20 to 120 m ²	20 to 120 m ²
Internal Building Divisions	limited / none	limited / none
Building Form	rectilinear	Curvilinear
Building Orientation	onto road	doors to south-east
Groupings	none apparent	family compounds
Compound Orientation	dictated by relationship to fort and main roads	bias towards entrances opening to east and south-east
Site Aspect	north and south slopes	bias towards south and east facing slopes
Mode of Production	industrial / redistribution of imports	agricultural / production centre
Rubbish Disposal	careless, large on-site accumulations	habitation areas kept clean, off site manuring
Ritual Deposition	deep pits, internal to settlement	natural, off-site locations; settlement boundaries

Table 3: A comparison Roman and native settlement and lifestyle

The Newstead military complex was a totally alien creation. Status and access to resources were dependent almost entirely on internal power relations. It is, therefore, not surprising that its layout

was inward looking and divorced from the natural landscape. Religious activities were probably moulded by the same forces. Ritual deposition, which occurs in at least a quarter of Newstead's pits and wells (Clarke 1997; Clarke & Jones 1996), has frequently been regarded as the continuation of an indigenous belief system (most notoriously Ross 1967; Ross & Fenchem 1976). There are certainly some striking parallels between 'Roman' and 'Celtic'. Pit 22, for example, with its three parade helmets (Curle 1911:121-2) strongly recalls the cult of the head. Virtually none of the major finds from the pits would look out of place in a prehistoric ritual deposit (cf. Clarke 1996 & Hunter 1997). What set Newstead apart was the context of the deposits; artificial shafts in the interior of the settlement. Acts of conspicuous consumption, in some ways very similar to those at Newstead, were undertaken by the local native population, for example the hoard of horse trappings and tools deposited at Eckford twenty km south east of Newstead (Piggott 1953). However, the settings were quite different. Deposition was mostly an off-site activity, usually at a natural feature such as a mountaintop, lake, bog or river (Hunter 1997:Appendix 1, SE Scotland). Interestingly the loss or disposal of less obviously symbolic material by the Romanized and indigenous populations of this region followed a similar pattern. Surface finds were spectacularly numerous within Newstead's occupation area, but fell off to next to nothing within a few tens of metres of the settlement's boundaries (Jones & Clarke 1994:figures 1, 2). In stark contrast artefacts were virtually absent from contemporary native farmsteads, even when they sit within a relatively dense halo of casually discovered material, as at Lilliesleaf (Jones *et al.* 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993; J. Dent pers. comm.). To me this suggests a completely different set of priorities. For the native population the deposition of cultural material, along with human and animal manure, on agricultural land surrounding the settlement perhaps reflected the struggle for dominance over the natural environment. It may also imply competition between different family groups, trying to establish control of local resources. What on-site deposition has been identified often occurred at the farmsteads' boundaries, particularly the ditches and gateways. Again this suggests anxiety about relations between, rather than within native sites.

Encounter and interaction

So far the two communities have been discussed as if they existed in isolation, but clearly there must have been some sort of contact and response. The relative lack of Roman objects and stylistic influences at native settlements has usually been explained in terms of the region's material poverty and the lack of opportunity for interaction. However, the evidence emerging in the Borders renders this simplistic view increasingly unsatisfactory. The region surrounding Newstead is now known to have been densely occupied in the early first millennium AD. In the absence of evidence for mass depopulation, as the result of the Roman invasion, it is difficult to see how 'Roman' and native could have lived in anything other than close proximity. Furthermore co-existence can hardly be regarded as having been transitory. The first fort at Newstead was built *c.* AD 80 (Curle 1911, Richmond 1952), and the last not finally abandoned until the late second or early third century [4]. In spite of a hiatus in the Trajanic period, occupation must have lasted between 70 and 100 years, easily long enough elsewhere in Britain for strong signs of cultural change to manifest themselves. If the two populations co-existed for extended periods without their cultural practices beginning to converge it is tempting to believe that the natives did not have anything that the Romans wanted and that the Romans did not have anything the natives could afford. But again this proposition does not stand up to close scrutiny of the evidence.

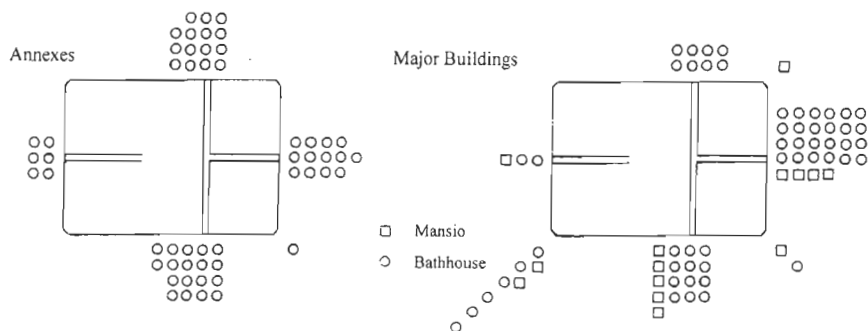


Figure 3 Extramural Occupation at British Auxiliary Forts (after Sommer 1984)

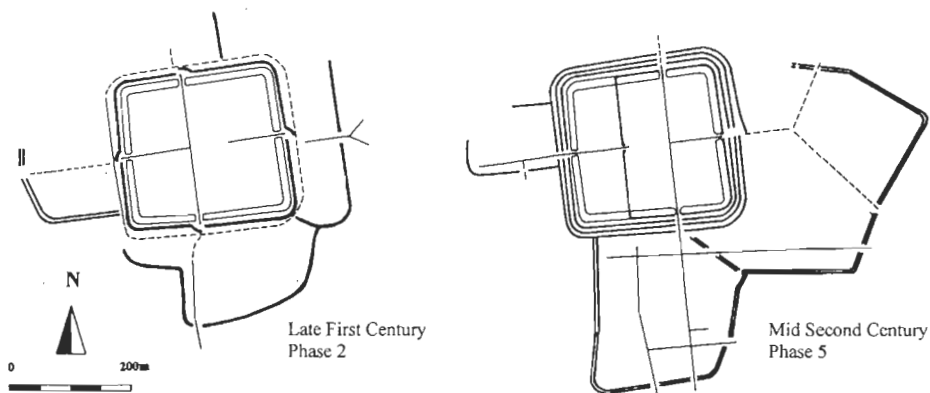


Figure 4 Newstead Fort first and second Century Arrangement. The relative importance of the east and west annexes appears to have changed with the reversal of the forts road system in the second century (Clarke 1996)

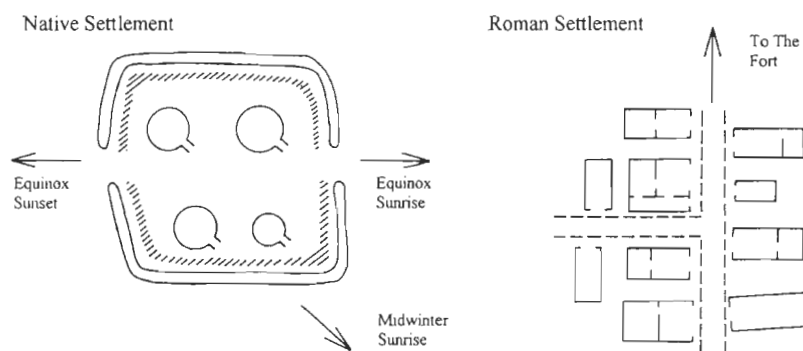


Figure 5 Idealised Roman and Native Settlement Organisation.

In the past the presence of indigenous material culture at military sites has been difficult to identify (Hanson & Macinnes 1991:90). The volume of material is small, and has usually been hidden under a mountain of 'Roman' debris. However, modern field work and careful reconsideration of existing collections does tentatively suggest links. For example, while Newstead was clearly dependent on large-scale importation from outside the immediate region, there is growing evidence for local provisioning. Plant macro-fossil evidence indicates that barley, possibly produced locally, made a significant supplementary contribution, alongside imported wheat, to Newstead's food supply (C. Palmer pers. comm.). Hand-made native pottery was also consistently present throughout the military complex, albeit in tiny quantities (P. Rush pers. comm.). Amongst the numerous flat rotary lava querns, imported from Germany, there was at least one distinctively native British beehive form, fashioned from millstone grit (Curle 1911:145-6). Evidence for native communities acquiring Roman goods is also slight, but again probably more significant than absolute quantities would suggest. Finds of any kind are extremely rare on native sites. When Roman material is recovered it often makes up quite a high proportion of the total assemblage, as at Bemersyde Hill (Jones *et al.* 1990). In addition Roman artefacts do turn up in significant quantities from off-site contexts, both individually and as part of hoards. In the past these have often been regarded as casual loss or concealment by the Roman military (cf. Manning 1981:57). More recently studies have recognised that the majority represent a native tradition of ritual deposition (Hunter 1997) especially where Roman goods have been found in conjunction with objects of local manufacture. Robertson has noted the quality of these exotic imports was often high relative to goods recovered from Roman forts (Robertson 1970). It is, therefore, hard to argue that the indigenous population failed to adopt a more Roman lifestyle on grounds of poverty or isolation. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the lack of cultural convergence was a deliberate choice. To understand that choice we need to examine how the two societies perceived themselves and each other.

<i>Native Sites</i>		
	<i>Roman take</i>	<i>Native take</i>
Settlement layout and orientation	disorderly	Aligned with features in the natural environment
Architectural style	barbaric	Traditional
Absence of debris	materially poor	Clean / ritual deposition elsewhere
Socially embedded economy	economically backward	Socially responsible
<i>Roman Settlement</i>		
	<i>Roman take</i>	<i>Native take</i>
Settlement layout and orientation	orderly	Divorced from the landscape
Architectural style	civilised	Alien
Presence of debris	materially rich	Dirty / ritual environment
Disembedded economy	economically advanced	Socially irresponsible

Table 4: *Perception and reality*

Not only were the two societies materially quite different, but their perceptions of reality were probably very much at odds. The inhabitants of Newstead's extramural settlement no doubt viewed it as orderly, civilised, materially wealthy and economically advanced. The native population may have regarded the same features very negatively. The alien architecture and, in particular, the buildings' alignments, could be seen as chaotic, even dangerously estranged from the natural environment. The settlement's wealth of discarded artefacts might be seen as squalid, or even ritually polluting, rather than as evidence of material well being. Similarly, against a back drop of prostitution,

unmarried single mothers [5] and denial of family by the army the Roman disembedded economy could quite reasonably be dismissed as socially irresponsible. Loaded down with so many negative connotations Roman material culture must have lost much of its appeal as a status symbol. The Roman view of native lifestyle is scarcely likely to have been more flattering. Under these circumstances the absence of cultural convergence was hardly surprising.

The limited cross-cultural knowledge might even have re-enforced the distinctions between the two groups. This sort of reactionary behaviour is often attributed to indigenous societies and described as cultural resistance (cf. Kurchin 1995), although in practice it is actually very difficult to identify, partly because of the difficulties in accurately dating native settlements (see above). I believe a possible example does exist in the other direction; for a Roman community defining itself by negative references to native culture. At Vindolanda a group of roundhouses were built within the first stone fort in Period 2 (probably late second century). Originally excavated in the 1930's, no finds collection now survives to confirm their function. However, the most likely explanation is that they were built to accommodate native corvee labour (Bidwell 1985). The shape might be regarded as a cultural statement on the part of the labourers, but it is difficult to accept that such an overt act of resistance could be allowed within the fort. The coursed masonry walls were in any case quite alien to the native population. It might, therefore, be more likely that the buildings' shape was chosen by the Roman military authorities, who wished to keep native civilians culturally at arm's length. That nakedly racist attitudes had emerged amongst the military is confirmed by earlier documents recently recovered from Vindolanda. An intelligence report (T1985/32, dated c. AD 90-95) referred to the fighting qualities of the *Brittunculi* or wretched Britons (Bowman & Thomas 1987:136). In another (T1988/943R, dated c. AD 120) a man pleaded for clemency, arguing that not only was he innocent, but he was *hominem transmarinum*, an overseas man (Birley 1990:20, 26). Whatever the racial origin of vici's inhabitants it was clearly important socially to avoid any cultural association with the local indigenous community. This desire to fit in, to be accepted as Roman, may also be reflected in the unusually high proportion samian amongst the pottery assemblage of poorest section of the Newstead's community [6].

Conclusions

In conclusion, I believe we must try to move beyond mere material remains and examine the *habitus* or worldview that lead to their creation. The standard model for cultural change in Roman period Britain remains that of Romanization (cf. Millett 1990), a process which is said to 'extinguished the distinction between Roman and provincial' (Haverfield 1912:18). The model has been roundly criticised as sexist, elitist and imperialist (cf. Freeman 1996; Hingley 1991, 1995; Scott 1995). But equally problematic was that it was developed principally with Britain's south and east in mind, a geographical bias that even in the intervening ninety years has never really been rectified. Viewed from this narrow perspective the gradual adoption of 'superior' Roman culture seems a natural progression, needing no more detailed rationale. It is the lack of development in the north and west that has come to represent the anomaly. But if mere contact were enough for the success of Romanization its absence in the military zone runs counter to what might be intuitively expected. Soldiers and their dependants though themselves mostly provincials, with their own distinct sub-culture, were nevertheless closely identified with Rome and ought to have been a powerful force for acculturation. The fact that forts and vici remained islands of Romanization within a sea of indifference demonstrates that we need to think much more clearly about the motivation behind cultural adaptation.

Endnotes

- [1] For a discussion of the limited number of exceptions to this rule, see Bidwell (1985:28–31).
- [2] Data for tables 1 and 2 derives from consideration of all settlement enclosures of probable late prehistoric / Roman period date within the Newstead Research Project's 'Outer Zone', a 25 x 25 km region (NT 45 to 70 eastings, 25 to 50 northings).
- [3] Table 2 considers only single portal enclosures. Twelve out of the fourteen multi-portal enclosures had entrances to the east or south-east.
- [4] The last coin was minted c. AD 180 (MacDonald 1911:400), but some samian may have a Severan date (Hartley 1972) and a recently discovered intaglio depicts Caracalla (Elliot pers. comm.).
- [5] While stable relationships between soldiers and women in the extramural community and even within the fort itself were undoubtedly common (cf. van Driel-Murray 1995), formal marriage was not permitted by the army at this time.
- [6] In trench RGT 141, in the extreme south of the South Annexe, 18 percent of pottery was samian. This compares with just 11 percent from trench RGT 101, within the fort itself (Clarke 1995:fig. 8.4).

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