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Social Dynamics in the Northwest Frontiers of the Late Roman Empire

BEYOND DECLINE OR TRANSFORMATION

EDITORS

NICO ROYMANS, STIJN HEEREN & WIM DE CLERcq

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This volume is a collection of papers originally delivered at a Round Table Conference held in Tongeren (Belgium) on 15-16 January 2015, entitled *Decline and Fall? Social dynamics in the Late Roman Northwest (AD 270-450)*. The conference was part of a research project with the same title, carried out at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (NL) and Ghent University (B) in the framework of Flemish-Dutch cooperation, funded by the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Research Fund Flanders (FWO). The project started in the spring of 2012 and ended in 2016.

The central aim of the project also lies at the heart of the current publication: to present a new and innovative analysis of the Late Roman period in the northwestern provinces of the empire, thereby drawing on the wealth of new archaeological evidence gathered in the past few decades. Traditionally the Late Roman period is defined as the years between AD 270 and 450. Although the research period and some contributions to this volume also discuss developments in the earlier 3rd century, most of the research focuses on the far-reaching changes that took place in the 4th and early 5th centuries. The end of effective Roman state authority and the swiftly changing relationship between the Roman state and external forces, as well as regional variety in the shape and pace of several developments, are key issues in this volume.

We would like to express our gratitude to NWO and FWO for funding the research, and the participants of the Tongeren conference for their papers and their contributions to the discussions. We thank the Gallo-Romeins Museum in Tongeren for providing hospitality during the conference. Furthermore, we express our gratitude to anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this book. It goes without saying that the responsibility for the contents remains with the authors and editors. Finally, we would like to thank Bert Brouwenstijn and Jaap Fokkema for the cartography and layout of the current volume, and Annette Visser (New Zealand) for checking the English of several papers. In July 2016 we received the sad news that Kenneth Painter passed away. We are very grateful for his contribution to this volume.

*Nico Roymans / Stijn Heeren / Wim De Clercq*  
Amsterdam/Ghent, 25 October 2016
Introduction. New perspectives on the Late Roman Northwest

Nico Roymans / Stijn Heeren

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2 Precious metal flows and imperial power
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I IMPERIAL POWER AND FRONTIER DYNAMICS

Since the appearance of Gibbon's seminal work *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789), the final phase of the West Roman empire has always attracted much scholarly attention. Several key issues in the current debate are centuries-old and have been regularly revitalised. A remarkable constant in the discussion is the relation between imperial authority and external ‘barbarian’ groups, and this interaction of endogenous and exogenous forces will be the point of departure of this volume. The Roman empire cannot be understood without considering the social dynamics in its frontier regions. This volume focuses on the social and cultural dynamics in the northwestern frontier zone during the 4th and 5th century, paying special attention to Germania Secunda and Britannia, regions where important new archaeological research has taken place in the last decades in combination with innovative theoretical discussions.

This volume proceeds from a broad historical perspective in which four main forces or pressure groups are distinguished that determined the developments in the frontier zones, respectively imperial authority, the Roman army, rural elites and barbarian groups outside the Roman world. First, the contours of this historical perspective are elaborated in the contribution of Peter Heather. Next, Raymond Brulet’s paper concentrates on the changing organisation and strategies of the Late Roman army and its strongholds in the northwestern provinces. Departing from the paradigm of frontier defence, he addresses the basic question whether the military control of the frontier was determined by a pragmatic *ad hoc* policy or by an underlying central strategic concept. The value of the papers of both Heather and Brulet is that they apply, adapt and expand already existing ideas to the northwestern fringes of the empire, thereby setting the scene for the following papers.

The following studies by Nico Roymans, Fraser Hunter & Kenneth Painter and Vince Van Thienen are dealing with mobile material culture and its relevance for the study of changing power relations in the Late Roman world. Finally, the contributions by Alain Vanderhoeven, Stijn Heeren, Simon Esmonde Cleary and Rob Collins focus on regional developments in Germania Secunda and Britannia, thereby making full use of newly acquired archaeological data. The comparison between Germania and Britannia has proved important: observations made in one paper have gained significance in the contexts of other papers. Not all contributions aim to present new perspectives and contribute to theoretical debates. Alain Vanderhoeven’s paper, for example, focuses on providing an overview of the results of new archaeological
fieldwork in the Late Roman town of Tongres, which enable us to understand the contemporary social transformations from an urban perspective. This volume of complementary papers provides a number of new insights and points for debate that can direct future research. Some topics will be discussed in greater detail below.

2 PRECIOUS METAL FLOWS AND IMPERIAL POWER

The papers by Hunter & Painter and Roymans study deposits of Roman precious metal, mostly hacked silver and coined gold, which are regularly found in the frontier regions of the Late Empire. Roymans’ paper focuses on the gold flows from the imperial centre to Frankish groups living in Lower Germany on both sides of the Rhine. This gold influx offers us insight into changing power relations between imperial authorities and Germanic groups. Imperial authorities used the gold payments for buying off of peace and stability and for the exploitation of the military potential of non-Roman groups. Roymans observes a considerable diachronic and regional variation in the imperial gold influx and tries to connect this to historically documented political interaction between Frankish groups and Roman authorities. Finally he addresses the question of the wider impact of the regular payments of gold tributes to frontier groups on the Roman state finances. This financial perspective on the decline of the Roman empire has been underexplored to date.

The papers of Hunter & Painter and Roymans show interesting differences between precious metal circulation in the Lower Rhine area and the British frontier regions. In the Lower Rhine region the influx of Roman gold plays a much larger role than in the British frontier, where Roman silver, and in particular Hacksilber, clearly dominates. How should we interpret such differences? Hunter & Painter consider two options, the first one being different cultural choices of local groups; frontier groups in Scotland may have preferred silver above gold. An alternative explanation may be a differentiated imperial policy. For the Roman authorities the military threat and the strategic importance of British frontier groups were relatively limited and did not require regular payments of gold subsidies. Were payments in silver satisfactory here to control these groups?

Important in this respect is the paper of Esmonde Cleary, who does not study precious metal specifically, but notes a diminished supply of Britain’s northern frontier from the second half of the 4th century onwards. Although Collins, in contrast to Esmonde Cleary, sees continued army presence and supply to Hadrians Wall, he too notes a rather peaceful transition instead of the upheavals of war. The relative stability, resulting in a diminished imperial attention, seems an important background to explain the presence of silver instead of gold in this province.

Another interesting topic is how to understand the drying up of the Roman gold influx in the mid-5th century Lower Germanic frontier zone. Opinions vary on this theme. According to Roymans this marks the end of effective Roman authority in this region. Heather, on the other hand, interprets this as an indication for a successful restauration of Roman authority; it was no longer necessary for the emperor to buy peace with gold payments. This latter interpretation, however, seems to underestimate the impact the early 5th century gold influx had on the internal social organisation of Lower Rhine Frankish groups. The stagnation of the gold influx (after a clear peak in the early 5th century) must have been a direct threat to the continuation of the power position of Frankish warlords. We can imagine two scenario’s: 1. disintegration of the warbands and the loss of the social position of their leaders; 2. a move of the leaders and their gold objects in his grave, including approx. 100 solidi and many high-quality ornaments, probably represent gifts acquired from the emperor or one of his officials. Cf. Quast 2015, 233.
warbands to more southern areas in Belgic Gaul that were still under Roman control. Here, the Frankish leaders could still receive regular payments as allies of the emperor, thus enabling them to reproduce and further strengthen their power positions. This latter scenario corresponds well with the late 5th century presence of rivaling Frankish warleaders, including Childeric, in the southern half of Belgic Gaul. They, or their fathers may have settled there a few decades earlier, coming from the Lower Rhine frontier zone. About 445 we hear from a battle at vicus Helena near Arras in North France, where the Roman general Aetius beat a Frankish army led by a king Chlodio, who then seems to have continued his position as a local Roman client king. This example shows that in the mid-5th century the southern move of Frankish groups to Northern France was well under way. Against this background it is interesting to observe that many immigrant Frankish settlements from the early 5th century in the Lower Rhine/Meuse region were already abandoned after one or two generations. Although this requires further investigation, the stopping of the influx of Roman gold in the Lower Rhine region may be related to the mid-5th century southward migration of Frankish groups, as documented in the historical sources.

3 THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MIGRATION

Changes of all kinds in frontier situations were closely connected to the presence and pressure of external people living close by. Since Gibbon's study the phenomenon of migration has been a prominent academic subject, and archaeologists working from a cultural historical paradigm played an important role in the pioneer stages of migration studies. In Anglophone processual archaeology an anti-migrationist attitude developed from the 1960s onwards, which preferred to explain changes in material assemblages in terms of exchange relations and changing identity-constructions, rather than by moving people. The theme of migration became somewhat of an academic backwater, at least the archaeological treatment of migration. Although many arguments and cases have shown that anti-migrationist models provide valuable insights, the reality of ancient migration must not be questioned altogether.

Several contributors to the current volume pay attention to migration in the Late Roman period. Heather discusses new tribal formations in the immediate foreland of the frontier and counts migration as one of the processes behind the new formations. Roymans argues for a connection between gold deposits in the Lower Rhine region and Frankish foederati, suggesting that migration of Frankish groups into the frontier area is reflected in the distribution pattern of gold hoards. Heeren specifically studies archaeological correlates for migration and concludes that mobilia (mainly pottery of foreign styles), distinct building traditions and indicators for diet, can be considered proxies for migrations. In the case of Germania Secunda, all three proxies are present and (in combination with regional discontinuities in habitation patterns) enable us to identify Germanic settlers on former provincial-Roman soil.

In the German archaeological tradition, migration and the ability of archaeologists to treat the phenomenon was questioned only recently. Methodologically, the research focused on devising distribution maps of particular types of object thought to be characteristic of certain ethnic groups. These distribution maps were seen as proof for migrations. Looking back, we think that objects alone cannot reveal migration persuasively. Theoretical archaeology has argued convincingly that objects and peoples' ethnic identity cannot be equated since identities are complex, multi-layered and dynamic. While some of the

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5 Wightman 1985, 302-303; Dierkens/Périn 2003, 169 ff.
6 Blok 1968, 18; Wightman 1985, 303; Dierkens/Périn 2003.
5 Hakenbeck 2008.
6 For an overview of the debate, see Halsall 2000; Halsall 2007; Theuws 2009.
older German conclusions regarding the immigration of *foederati* in the early 5th century are now recurring, there is no question of returning to the same methods. The re-vitalisation of the migration debate comes from new theoretical avenues as well as different methodical approaches and is backed up by a growing empirical dataset.

Additionally, future studies on 5th century migration should also include linguistic research, since linguistic change is not only determined by acculturation but also by migration. Finally, the promising study of geochemical analysis of isotopes in dental enamel of buried individuals should be mentioned. This area of research is rapidly developing. While the results of strontium isotopes alone have their limitations, multi-isotope approaches reveal more precise results, and will provide a new science-based data-set in the migration debate.

All these new approaches offer valuable contributions to the study of ancient migration. We observe that the scholarly attention for this topic is already 250 years old, but is still - or again – highly vital.

4 MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE ETHNIC DEBATE

The tradition of ethnic interpretation of material culture is over a century old. Since Gustav Kossinna formulated his thesis of *Kulturkreise* - regions of distinct material culture connected to the habitation area of a people – in 1911, a wide variety of objects has been interpreted in ethnic terms. Although this practice has attracted criticism in Anglophone archaeology as well as from theoretically-oriented German scholars, ethnic labeling of artefacts is still widely used. And since it is realised that the spatial distribution of objects almost never coincides with the territories of historically known tribal groups, there has been a tendency to reduce ethnic interpretation to broadly used macro-categories like ‘Germans’, ‘Franks’ or ‘Alamanni’.

The identification of finds in terms of a simple classification of Germanic versus Roman is often problematic. Even if it can be proven that finds were produced beyond the imperial border, were these objects (and their wearers) then Germanic and utterly un-Roman? The problem becomes more pregnant in the case of Germanic federate groups along the Lower Rhine. Roymans shows that the use of Roman precious metals, both gold and silver, coined and uncoined, also had an ethnic dimension since they were used to buy the loyalty of Frankish federates. Heeren elaborates on the link between the precious metal deposits and settlements of distinctly transrhenish character. Their inhabitants were certainly of Germanic descent, but were paid by the Roman state to fight in the name of Rome. This enabled these people to profile themselves as Roman soldiers and assume a (partly) Roman identity, while in other situations they could cultivate their Germanic origin and identity. It is therefore less helpful to classify their material culture as either Roman or Germanic. The use of these labels should be restricted to issues of provenance, not of ethnic identity.

Since the publications of Böhme and Werner the ethnic debate in the Lower Rhine frontier is closely related to the concept of *foederati*, i.e. autonomous non-Roman groups that had some kind of treaty relationship with the imperial authorities. While the role of *foederati* has been deconstructed in the past two decades when treating the grave ritual (the topic of the so-called ‘weapon graves’), several contributions of this volume now return to the subject, with different source material. As highlighted above, Roymans and Heeren treat precious metal deposits and built structures from settlements in the Lower Rhine region as indicators for federate groups; the *foederati* were probably the only groups that received gold payments from the Roman authorities in exchange for their military support.

11 Font *et al.* 2012; Font *et al.* 2015.
13 See for example Quast 2009; Martin 2014.
14 Böhme 1974; Werner 1958.
Interestingly, Collins uses the absence of large cemeteries and the continued use of Roman forts in northern England in the post-Roman period to argue for a slow transformation from Roman garrisons to warbands in Britannia. Sudden changes in burial ritual, for instance the appearance of cemeteries with furnished inhumation graves, have been associated with new ethnic formations or a dramatic change in social circumstances. The fact that this did not happen in the north of England is taken as an indicator for relative stability by Collins. Along the Lower Rhine, however, sudden changes did take place, in the form of abandonment of the Rhine lines by the Roman troops and subsequent immigration of people of Germanic descent. Large cemeteries are present there. The role of warbands in shaping 5th-century society is important in both the North of Britain and in the Lower Rhine area, however, the developments in the 4th century in both areas show fundamental differences.

The problem of associating finds with certain social groups applies above all to the military or non-military interpretation of weapons and belt sets. Brulet argues that the distinction between the Roman field army (comitatensis), the Roman territorial army (limitanei) and external auxilia (foederati) is already problematic in the written sources. Collins and Esmonde Cleary show that archaeologists have even more difficulty to separate these groups on the basis of mobile material culture. While Collins argues for continued military presence along Hadrians Wall until the early 5th century and a smooth transformation in the following decades, Esmonde Cleary studies the coin distribution and military belts and argues for a much earlier separation of the North from the longer supported south of Britannia. The problems attached to interpreting material finds are partly explained by the shifting meaning of material culture. Van Thienen shows that even the crossbow brooch, often taken as the indicator for the Roman army, had different meanings and contexts of use that evolved over time.

Many scholars have put into perspective the importance of ethnic identities in the past by emphasizing their flexible nature. Ward-Perkins, however, warns us not to over-emphasize the dynamic character of ethnic identities of individuals in Late Roman society. For example, the different blood-prices in the Lex Salica indicate us that the distinction between Franks and Romans was still felt significant around AD 500. The break-down of ethnic boundaries between ‘barbarians’ and ‘Romans’ seems to have been a gradual process that took several generations. Indeed, the material correlates of these groups remain uncertain, but this should not lead us to judge the distinctions to be unimportant.

We suspect that the ethnic debate, the role of external foederati and the material representations of various group cultures will be at the forefront of research in the time to come. We argue here that a long-term perspective and the inclusion of various classes of evidence is more helpful than rigid oppositions or too specific labels borrowed from the written sources.

5 TOWN-COUNTRYSIDE RELATIONS

From the days of Augustus until the 5th century AD the basic units of the Roman imperial administration were the civitates, consisting of an urban center and its surrounding countryside. The landowning elite controlled the administration of the cities as well as the rural peasantry. As Heather reminds us in his contribution, the landowning elite was a major pillar in the imperial control of the empire. In return for the tax they paid, the rights and interests of the landowning elites were central concerns of the emperor and the decision-making body around him. The ties between the central government and the regions, as well as between town and country remained strong into the Late Roman period.

19 Cf. Roymans/Derks 2011, 14-28; Heather. For the Late Roman period specifically: Esmonde Cleary 2015, ch. 6-7; Heather, this volume.
The basic question various authors pose is: how long into the Late Roman period did this basic structure remain intact? For the West-Roman empire, Heather argues that the bond between emperor, army and landowning elites remained strong way into the 5th century and did not break before the settlement of Visigoths and others in the heartland of Gaul, where most taxes were generated. At the fringes of the empire, however, land-loss occurred earlier. Heeren argues for the settlement of *foederati* in Germania Secunda and Belgica Secunda from the first decade of the 5th century already, but large depopulations north of the road Cologne-Tongeren-Bavay already occurred more than a century earlier. Minor though these losses were from an empire-wide perspective, it weakened landholding and thus tax-revenues in these provinces from the late 3rd century onwards.

The question is how long the basic structure of elite landholding remained functioning south of the road Cologne-Tongeren-Bavay. Although the Late Roman transformations of villa estates received scholarly attention in previous decades, no good answers have been given as to the extent to which villas still generated surpluses to support the cities and to pay taxes. The phenomenon of ‘squatter occupation’, by which the settlement of post-built farmhouses and sunken huts on (former?) villa estates is meant, is described by various authors, but the question of a continued functioning of the traditional villa system remains unclarified.

Although the current volume contains no contribution to fill this research gap, we see it as an important direction for future research. South of the road Cologne-Tongeren-Bavay many Roman-style villas survived the so-called ‘crisis of the 3rd century’, but the question is of how long they remained in use. Did they all stop producing in the early 5th century, or is this a matter of archaeological visibility? And how does this rural evidence relate to the development of urban elite dwellings in the last surviving *civitas* centres of Germania Secunda, Tongeren and Cologne? Vanderhoeven presents in his paper a clear picture of the situation in Tongeren. Urban *domus* – symbol of the land-owning elite – remain in function here until far into the 4th century, but they fall out of use around 400 and the town seems completely deserted around the mid-5th century.

**6** **BEYOND DECLINE OR TRANSFORMATION**

Since the emergence of the school of Late Antiquity a marked break in the historiography of the Late Roman period is observed. While Edward Gibbon and the following two centuries of scholarship voiced only the Roman perspective of a decline of imperial power, resulting in a narrative of impoverishment, loss of territory and ultimately the ‘fall’ of the Roman empire, the school of Late Antiquity changed the perspective and described changes from the 3rd century onwards in a more positive way. The Late Roman period and Early Middle Ages were increasingly seen as a transformatory stage between the High Roman empire and the empire of Charlemagne. It is argued that early medieval kingdoms are in no way inferior to the Roman empire and that the role of invading barbarian groups must not be overstated. Many areas prospered, unaffected by invasions, many institutions were continued, and situations developed gradually instead of suddenly. While Late Antiquity has proved very influential indeed, the change of perspective is not uncontested. The ‘terrible twins of 2005’, two publications very different in terms of coverage, size and approach, have in common that they forcefully argued that barbarian groups from outside the empire

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21 See note 20, especially Lenz 2001; Lewit 2003.
were a prime mover towards the end of Roman authority and that violence and impoverishment were true factors in the decline of Roman state structures in the west.

The current volume does not choose between one school or another. Transformations are highlighted in for instance the paper of Brulet on the Late Roman army and the continental frontiers and the one by Collins on Britain’s northern frontier. In the contribution of Heather, decline and fall is a central feature: the sudden breakdown of imperial authority is evident. Roymans’ paper focuses on gold hoards and the very nature of this source material, which is supplied by the state and is found because of a drain of gold to barbarian groups, provides arguments for the decline and fall scenario. However, both Heeren and Roymans argue that the perspectives of decline and transformation need not exclude each other; they refer to processes that happened at the same time and were also in the same hands. The *foederati* received gold payments and drained resources from the central government, and frequently turned against the Roman government. At the same time, they represented Rome, fought in the name of the emperor, and settled in former provinces, connected to sites previously used by the provincial population. Heather too makes some important observations on this subject. He argues that the political unification of the Franks, different to for instance the Goths and Alamanni, was a post-Roman creation, an effect, rather than a cause of the West-Roman imperial collapse. Furthermore, he warns us not to write off the imperial centre ability to control its northwest frontier too early in the 5th century. Until the mid-5th century the central imperial authorities “remained the most powerful shark swimming in the West European waters, able to inflict damaging defeats on barbarians.” We conclude that both decline and transformation were historical realities. They represent two sides of the same medallion and we propose that the perspectives should not be used as a binary opposition.

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Decline, Collapse, or Transformation? The case for the northern frontier of Britannia

Rob Collins

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I INTRODUCTION

The fragmentation of the Western Roman Empire over the course of the 5th century began with a sequence of events that started in the Rhineland with the resultant permanent loss of Britannia by c. AD 410. The severance of imperial rule of Roman Britain is often thought to have resulted in a drastic collapse of many, perhaps most of the structures of provincial life in the first decades of the 5th century. Explicitly linked to the loss of Roman civilization is a presumed withdrawal of the Roman soldiers from Britain: ‘Britain faced economic meltdown in the early 5th century, after the withdrawal of Roman armies and the end of the Roman provincial administration around 410’. However, we should be critical of the widely received view of the end of Roman Britain. While the permanent separation of Britain from the rest of the Roman Empire was a definitive political event, it should also be remembered that the diocese of Britannia consisted of four or five provinces, and there is a danger in assuming that the divorce from the Empire had the same impacts in each province. Archaeological evidence from Hadrian’s Wall indicates continued occupation at a number of Roman forts that prompts a broader question of what happened in the Roman frontiers as imperial authority retreated back to the core of the Empire.

A series of models have been proposed that provide a basic framework specifically for the end of the Roman frontier in Britain, though these models are of course also bound to the broader notion of the end of Roman Britain and the Roman West more largely. Barbarian migration remains a prominent and relevant theme for the Rhine and Danube frontiers, but for Britannia, questions regarding the latest occupations of the imperial frontiers can be explored without the complications of debates surrounding barbarian

1 Faulkner 2004.
2 Wickham 2009, 150, italics my emphasis.
3 White 2007 is explicit in this with his treatment of Britannia Prima.
migration. Discarding the distraction of those aspects strongly linked to barbarians, we are allowed to focus on the more fundamental question of how we identify the Roman army, specifically the *limitanei*, of the later 4th and 5th centuries AD through the archaeological record. Beginning with a brief summary of the key models for the decline and/or transformation of the northern frontiers, these models are then assessed relative to archaeological evidence from sites in the frontier. The paper closes with a discussion of the military archaeology of the frontier, and raises questions for our understanding of the latest phases of military occupation for other Late Roman military frontiers. Figure 1 is provided for reference.

2. THE FINAL-PHASE FRONTIER IN NORTHERN BRITANNIA

In recent decades, new archaeological evidence has prompted a reconsideration of what happened to Hadrian’s Wall and northern Britannia in the late 4th and early 5th century. For centuries, the dominant

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4 Halsall 2013 discusses the dating of Gildas, arguing for a later 5th-early 6th century date.

5 Halsall 2007, 519-526.
narrative was that Roman soldiers were withdrawn from Britain for the defence of Italy and other distant parts of the empire, derived and sustained primarily from Gildas’ section on the northern history of the former diocese of Britannia written in the early-mid-6th century. However, new models suggested alternative ‘endings’ to the frontier, in light of the evidence emerging primarily from the sites of South Shields, Vindolanda, and Birdoswald. These models are presented relative to their historical chronology.

2.1 ‘MAXIMIAN’ OR THEODOSIAN REORGANISATION

There is a presumed reorganisation and possible relocation of the frontier and its garrison that has been linked to historical episodes documented in textual sources. Primarily, these are the usurpations of Magnus Maximus in 382/383 and of Constantine III in 406/407, though there is disagreement among modern scholars as to which usurpation may have been more important.

Most recently, Halsall has argued that it was in the context of Magnus Maximus’ preparations for forcing his claim to the purple in Gaul in 382/383 that he reorganised the defences of Britain, purportedly stripping the regular soldiers of Britain for his own army and replacing them with northern Germanic foederati (that is to say, ‘Saxons’). Under such an arrangement, foederati would take over the existing military installations and duties, and Halsall argues that the material culture of these new soldiers would appear very much the same as ‘normal’ Roman soldiers, but would also explain the non-standard appearance of some structures at these military sites, such as the ‘timber halls’ at Birdoswald (discussed below).

The same changes to military organisation can also be credited to Constantine III, following the reasonable assumption that he stripped Britain of at least some soldiers to support his claim to the imperial throne. Furthermore, the presence and distribution of so-called official military metalwork suggests that regular Roman soldiers were repositioned to guard the economically richer villa zone of southern Britannia. The role of Magnus Maximus and Constantine III will be considered in greater detail below, when textual evidence is examined in section 3.

2.2 THE WAR BAND TRANSFORMATION

Excavations at Birdoswald, primarily the demolition of the Roman granaries and their replacement with a series of timber-built structures interpreted as (feasting or mead) halls prompted Wilmott to argue that the limitanei garrisons ceased to function as soldiers for the Roman state and instead became warriors in the service of a local leader, essentially forming a warband that is a common feature of post-Roman vernacular texts. Wilmott dates this change to the 5th century in Britain and significantly does not argue for any mass withdrawal of soldiers. Archaeological evidence from other fort sites, notably South Shields and Vindolanda in the Wall corridor and the legionary fortress at York, provide indications for changes to military buildings and continued activity and occupation into the 5th century.

Subsequently, I have modified this model, accepting the transformation of soldier to warrior (table 1), but arguing that the seeds for this change were planted in the 4th century. The limitanei experienced (and perhaps contributed to) a process of increasingly distinct regionalisation through the 4th century. Regionalisation was particularly pertinent to the limitanei in stable frontiers that did not as frequently require

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6 Halsall 2007, 196-198; 2012; Cool 2010 and Esmonde Cleary (this volume) have also advocated a retreat of the ‘frontier’ to a more southerly line that corresponds with the Roman road known as the Fosse Way.
7 Wilmott 1997.
9 Collins 2012.
direct imperial interventions, but significantly the occurrence of this process was also consistent with institutional changes to the Late Roman military and state. Furthermore, the process of regionalisation in combination with the institutional structure of the late Roman army blurred some of the distinctions between the soldier and the warrior, particularly in the years after 410.

2.3 MILITARY WITHDRAWAL

The possibility has also been raised that the changes observed in Late Roman forts in northern Britain cannot be attributed to soldiers; rather, these changes may indicate a completely new, non-military population or community inhabiting the forts in the aftermath of a complete military withdrawal by the early 5th century. Withdrawal need not have occurred in a single event; rather, the usurpation of Constantine III may have been the final withdrawal of an already reduced garrison, depleted in previous decades by the usurpations of Magnus Maximus and Eugenius and the planned eastern campaigns of Stilicho. This argument accepts the more recent archaeological evidence for 5th century activity and occupation, but otherwise follows the historical narrative of complete military withdrawal promulgated in the 6th century by Gildas and followed by some modern historians, attributing the withdrawal to one or more usurpers that started in Britain.

A central point of disagreement in the three models above is when or if the ‘regular’ frontier soldiers, the limitanei, were withdrawn from the frontier. The models also rely to a varying degree on textual or archaeological evidence, and these data must be treated discretely.

3 TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

It must be emphatically stated that there is no reliable contemporary account of the later 4th or early 5th century that indicates exactly when and how many soldiers were withdrawn from Britain or the provision of foederati. Much of the narrative for the early 5th century is drawn from fragments written by Olympiodorus preserved in the later texts of Sozomen and Zosimus, supplemented by Orosius and the Gallic Chronicle of 452. Three usurpers were raised in Britain in quick succession in response to barbarian incursions across the Rhine at the end of 405. The last and most successful of these, Constantine III, left Britain for the continent in 407, and must have travelled with an army. The source of the soldiers and the size of his army from Britain is unresolved; it is generally accepted that he probably withdrew the British field army under the command of the comes Britanniarum. In 409/410, the Britons and northern Gaul revolted against the regime of Constantine III, though the immediate causes for this are still debated. After this, Britain was never reintegrated with the Roman Empire.

10 Hodgson 2009, 40.
For historians of Britain, Gildas’ *De Excidio Britanniae* is particularly prominent as it provides a narrative for the Roman and early post-Roman history of Britain, also having been written in Britain (or so it is regularly presumed). But this prominence is problematic for a number of reasons. Gildas explicitly named Magnus Maximus as the man that took the whole of Britain’s army to the continent, with the implication that the absence of professional, state-supported defence and the subsequent incursions by Picts and Irish raiders was the impetus for the building of two walls across northern Britain. Later in the narrative, an unnamed *superbus tyrannus* is credited with inviting Saxon mercenaries to Britain, presumably, as all the soldiers had been withdrawn. The walls (the Antonine Wall and Hadrian’s Wall) were built at the behest of the native Britons, not a *foederati* garrison in need of support. It is also claimed that the northern part of the island was seized amid much slaughter, presumably instigated by the Picts, and with the subsequent abandonment of many towns. Significantly, Constantine III is not named by Gildas, and the last emperor of Roman Britain is Magnus Maximus. As with Gildas’ entire work, the claim for the withdrawal of the entire military garrison of Britain and the incorrect sequence of wall-building that follows are written in the highly stylised fashion of Late Roman rhetoric. It seems that within the 70–140 years between the presumed end of Roman Britain and Gildas’ account, the Hadrianic origins of the Wall were no longer known. For Gildas, the Wall simply connected and defended pre-existing towns (*urbes*). These historical inaccuracies, as well as the rhetorical and polemic function and structure of the text undermine any confidence that can be placed in Gildas’ history of Roman Britain.

Unfortunately, Ammianus Marcellinus, usually our best source for the 4th century, does not venture past the Battle of Adrianople in 378, and therefore has nothing to add. Occasional references or brief accounts from other texts can be utilised, such as the *Gallic Chronicle of 452*, but these continental sources usually refer to events that are most likely attributed to southern Britain, making their relevance to the frontier zone uncertain at best.

While textual sources are often employed to support an argument for the removal of soldiers from Britain, these same sources may also reveal events that could see an influx of new soldiers and/or frontier refurbishment. Short of explicit statements of actual numbers of soldiers removed, the use of textual accounts to support an argument for total military withdrawal is, at best, inconclusive. The most convincing source for withdrawal of army units from Britain is the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which provides more evidence for the redeployment of units from the commands of the Saxon Shore and the field army of the *comes Britanniarum* than that of the *dux Britanniarum* in the north. Of the 39 units under the command of the *dux Britanniarum*, only two can be confidently asserted to have been transferred to other com-

15 Ibid., 285-286. The entry for the 16th year of Honorius’ reign (409 or 410) in *Gallic Chronicle of 452* claims that the Britains were devastated by Saxons, and this entry has been evoked to explain the revolt against Constantine III’s regime. Kulikowski (2000, 338) links barbarian activity in 409 to the revolt of Gerontius against Constantine III.

16 Gildas 13.1-14; 15.1-18.3.

17 Woolf (2003) points out that Gildas named Magnus Maximus as the last Roman emperor of Britain, and the later occurring, unnamed emperors, such as the *superbus tyrannus*, would follow the pattern established by Orosius, who was a known source for Gildas. Following this reading, Gildas follows Orosius’ example of Maximus as the last named emperor, which would allow the *tyrannus* to be identified as Constantine III. Halsall (2007, 519-526), however, identifies the *superbus tyrannus* as Magnus Maximus, arguing that Gildas’ history can be separated into a ‘northern section’, ‘eastern section’, and ‘Christian section’ (see also Miller 1975). These geographic sections, Halsall argues, are relatively symmetrical in terms of historic events and episodes, and the activities of the *superbus tyrannus* occur in the eastern section and mirror the activities of Magnus Maximus in the northern section. If this sectional reading of Gildas is correct, then the invitation of the Saxons as *foederati* would be located in the ‘eastern section’ and should be further detached from Pictish attacks in the north of Britain (Gildas 23).

18 Lapidge 1984.

19 Gildas 18.2; 19.2.

20 Collins/Breeze 2014, 68-70, table 2.
mands, while the *comites Britanniamum* and *litoris Saxonici* each have at least three units (of nine) that appear under other commands elsewhere in the *Notitia*. This represents at least one-third of the units under the command of each *comes* being reassigned. While using the *Notitia* in this manner is hardly foolproof, it offers some indication of the movement of units from Britain in the 5th century. The *Notitia* also indicates that the units along the Wall in the late 4th or early 5th century were generally unchanged from the later 2nd century, the presence of which is confirmed by inscriptions.21 In other words, the Wall was garrisoned by the same units that occupied it during the Principate and did not undergo reorganisation through the 3rd and 4th centuries, as is apparent elsewhere under the command of the *dux Britanniamum* and most other frontier commands in the *Notitia*. Accepting the limitations of written accounts underscores the importance of the archaeological evidence.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE I: MORTUARY DATA

The archaeological evidence can be separated into three broad categories: mortuary remains, military metalwork and site/settlement activity. It is important to distinguish between these categories, as the northern frontier zone of Britain has excellent evidence for occupation and activity dating from the 4th–5th centuries, spanning the traditional end date for the Roman imperial rule of Britain. The northern British frontier zone has some evidence for artefacts of the period, but there is very little mortuary evidence of that date. Yet, it is the differential presence of evidence in these categories that distinguishes the northern frontier of Britain from the Rhine and the Danube.

The contrast is most clearly seen in the mortuary evidence. Furnished inhumation burial rituals become increasingly common through the 4th and 5th centuries along the Rhine and the Danube, manifesting initially in weapon-bearing graves and subsequently in the occurrence of sizeable row-grave cemeteries that corresponds generally to the frontier zone.22 Officers of the imperial army, barbarian *foederati* and post-Roman elites are recognised by the burials containing weapons, belt sets, and crossbow brooches. Yet the Late Roman mortuary record for the northern frontier of *Britannia* suffers from a dearth of evidence. A fairly typical example associated with Hadrian’s Wall are the four inhumation graves found outside the southwest gate of the fort of South Shields;23 the graves date to the 5th century based on both a TPQ from the stratigraphic sequence and 14C samples. The graves contained only human bone, with no evidence for any accompanying grave furniture or goods. Recent fieldwork at the sites of Birdoswald and Maryport has revealed a few Late Roman or early post-Roman graves, but analysis of these graves are in progress. Significantly, only one of these graves appears to have been accompanied by any objects, a bead necklace from a cist grave at Maryport. A Late Roman burial outside of the town of Corbridge at Shorden Brae, however, saw the inhumation of an individual buried with a crossbow brooch against the external walls of a 2nd century mausoleum.24 While the sample is admittedly small, these burials are likely to represent the ‘normal’


burial ritual in the Wall corridor, perhaps even the broader frontier zone – unfurnished inhumation, sometimes with a cist burial – with the example from Corbridge an exception to the rule.

This makes the cemetery of 15 furnished 4th-century burials from Scorton, north of the fort and town of Catterick all the more striking.25 Four of the graves contained crossbow brooches, and six graves contained belt fittings, two classes of artefact that are identified as military metalwork and are typically employed to identify officers, soldiers, veterans, and/or government officials; at Scorton, the individuals buried with these objects all appear to be male. Significantly, isotope analysis identifies the individuals buried with brooches and belt accessories as having origins in the European mainland; individuals bearing military metalwork were non-local. Eckardt et al. note the temptation to identify the foreign men as members of the Late Roman field army, the comitatenses, but refrain from making this assertion.26 Rather, they observe that the military was composed of individuals with diverse geographical origins.

Scorton, however, is a rather anomalous cemetery not only for the northern frontier region, but for the whole of Britannia. Large, inhumation cemeteries containing a number of highly furnished burials are not commonly found in Britain. Moreover, where they do occur, they appear to be associated with towns rather than military sites, as at Lankhills.27 This association is important, as it provides a context for which a burial ritual that emphasised military status may be more important. In the frontier zone or at a fort, many if not most men may have expressed a military identity, whereas in a town an army officer was only one of many high status identity groups.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE 2: MILITARY METALWORK

The association of crossbow brooches and belt accessories with the Roman army in Roman visual media also means that these objects can be used to identify a military presence in absence of a burial or military-type site. As noted above, the overall distribution of the so-called military metalwork has been used to argue for a redeployment of the Late Roman army in Britannia.28 However, these overall distributions mask a number of important observations.

Crossbow brooches offer an illustrative example. Swift’s excellent study looked at the distribution, form, dating, and association of crossbow brooches across the Late Roman West, confirming not only their association with the army and Late Roman state, but also highlighting regional patterning.29 Subsequently, I have examined the brooches from the frontier zone and Britain more broadly, incorporating new data that emerged after Swift completed her study.30 The latter study assessed a dataset of 286 brooches from Britain drafted from the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS; 143 examples), Swift (69 examples) and Collins (74 examples). This initial distribution revealed that crossbow brooches could be found across most of England, with greater occurrence south and east of the line drawn roughly from the Severn estuary to the Tees estuary and along Hadrian’s Wall. However, the distribution relative to the frequency of crossbow brooches at a given site alters the perception of the distribution; it is clear that they more commonly occur at military sites, namely Hadrian’s Wall and the Saxon Shore, London, and the cemeteries of Lankhills and Scorton (fig. 2). Nearly all other locations were individual finds. The presence of a number of military officers and state officials bearing crossbow brooches in London is not surprising given that it was the diocesan capital, and the signal presence of the cemeteries of Scorton and Lankhills further underscores how cemetery sites can significantly add to the quantity and distribution of brooches known. Removing London, Scorton and Lankhills from the distribution further highlights that crossbow brooches most frequently and commonly occur and cluster at military sites.

25 Eckardt/Müldner/Speed 2015.
26 Eckardt/Müldner/Speed 2015, 27, 28.
27 Clarke 1979; Booth et al. 2010.
28 See Esmond Cleary, this volume, fig. 5.
29 Swift 2000.
30 Collins 2010; 2015a.
The overall and 'filtered' distributions also mask important aspects of the typology and production of crossbows. Swift observed clusters of crossbows with the same typology and decorative motifs recurring along distinct sectors of the Rhine and Danube frontiers, with some outliers forward of and behind the frontiers. This suggests access and distribution to crossbow brooches with a more centralised production.

Fig. 2. The distribution of crossbow brooches (in red) by frequency overlaying the distribution of military sites (in black) occupied in the later 4th century. Black squares indicate forts under the command of the dux Britanniarum, black circles indicate forts of the comes litoris Saxonici, and black triangles are unattributed sites in Wales. The smallest red circles represent single finds, middle-sized circles represent 2-9 brooches, and large circle represents (more than) 10 brooches.
In contrast, *Britannia* seems to have a more diverse range of crossbow brooches, suggesting more localised production and distribution, reinforced by the fact that many crossbow brooches in Britain do not neatly fit into the standard typologies.\(^{32}\) Data from the PAS is particularly significant here, as PAS-recorded crossbow brooches are not generally associated with military or urban sites; many PAS-recorded crossbows tend to display a greater divergence from standard typological forms than those found at military and urban sites, particularly in type 3/4 which is the mostly widely occurring type of crossbow brooch.

Another brooch form may have also been considered as military metalwork, namely the zoomorphic penannular brooch. It is notable that in the northern frontier zone, Fowler type E penannulars are predominantly associated with military sites; furthermore, where contextual information is available, these type E penannulars date to AD 360 and later.\(^{33}\) While the link between the army or other aspects of Roman imperial authority is unproven, the fact that zoomorphic penannular brooches continued to develop into larger and more conspicuous form and were associated with the elite in early medieval Britain is suggestive.\(^{34}\)

Metalwork associated with belt suites must also be critically considered. Within Britain, emphasis is typically placed on Hawkes & Dunning\(^{35}\) type buckles and similar zoomorphic derivatives which have a distinctly southern British distribution.\(^{36}\) Yet, Late Roman buckles from military sites in the northern frontier, including the burials at Scorton, tend to be non-zoomorphic forms that fall outside the Hawkes & Dunning typology with zoomorphic buckles along the Wall limited to three examples from South

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\(^{32}\) Collins 2015a, 474.

\(^{33}\) Collins 2010, fig. 7.9; 2014.

\(^{34}\) Laing 1993.

\(^{35}\) Hawkes/Dunning 1961.

\(^{36}\) See also Esmé Cleary, this volume; Böhme 1986; Halsall 2012; Worrell/Pearce 2012. Note that Leahy 2007 observed the distinct dearth of evidence in proximity to the Saxon Shore forts.
Shields and Corbridge. Thus, a more cautious approach should be taken to zoomorphic buckles, particularly those without any secure archaeological provenance. The widespread occurrence of zoomorphic buckles across southern Britannia may provide testimony to the hypothesis of a self-consciously militarising civil elite. Other accessories typical of military belts, such as propeller-shaped stiffeners are only associated with military sites in the frontier zone, while strap ends have a wider distribution. Evidence for local production of amphora-shaped strap ends, however, has been found with a lead mould-piece from the fort at Stanwix along the Wall, and an unfinished piece from South Shields (fig. 3).

Despite the evidence for local production, the forms and decorative motifs displayed in crossbow brooches and belt equipment indicate that the northern frontier was still participating in contemporary aspects of military display, albeit with some local ‘flavour’. What is required, however, is a more detailed study of the belt equipment from Britain, teasing out differences in production, style, and distribution in detail; arguably, this is more likely to indicate not only clearer chronological variation, but may also further distinguish between official military and a broader adoption of this material outside of military communities.

6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE 3: SITE OCCUPATION/ACTIVITY

At the start of the 4th century, the northern frontier of Britannia had not changed substantially from the early 2nd century. A legionary fortress was still located at York in the east and Chester in the west. Forts were regularly placed along the roads leading north from these fortresses to Hadrian’s Wall. The Wall itself was still garrisoned from its east to west end, and there was a screen of four outpost forts to the north of the Wall. The Wall had changed somewhat since its erection in the 2nd century; most turrets were no longer standing, let alone occupied, and it is uncertain to what extent the milecastles along its length were manned. But the Wall forts still housed soldiers. The forts, however, would have appeared as rather outdated to soldiers serving in other frontier zones of the Late Roman Empire. Most Wall-forts retained the plan of their initial foundation, which for the majority of sites was in the 2nd century, taking a playing-card shape, with a principle gate along each stretch of wall, with modest square or rectangular towers built on or inside the curtain with very little projection. The fort curtain retained an earth rampart against its back, and only rarely were any upgrades made to defensive architecture. The internal plans of forts also generally retained the 2nd century origins, with a principia in the centre, flanked by horrea and a prae torium; barracks and other buildings were found in the front and rear ranges of the fort. This is not to claim that every fort was uniform in appearance or unchanged from the 2nd century; there had been many changes. But it is striking how conservative the military architecture of the 3rd and 4th centuries of northern Britannia is in comparison to that of the Rhine, Danube, and Eastern frontiers. The exception is most notably seen in the erection of the new installations along the North Yorkshire coast, which were fortlets typical of the Valentinianic era with a central square tower inside a curtain bearing projecting bastions.

I have discussed aspects of the changes to 4th century forts in detail elsewhere, but a summary of trends can be offered. Unsurprisingly, given the length of occupation and use of most forts in northern Britain, repair and/or refurbishment was made to a number of buildings, including barracks, praetorium and principia. The regular standardised barracks of the 2nd century were replaced with either semi-standardised
or less regular chalet-style barracks, which were further repaired or refurbished as necessary. Greater irregularity in the internal arrangements, size and position of individual rooms and structures has been identified at some sites occurring after c. 370. 43

Buildings were not only repaired, however, and many underwent a change in use alongside considerable modification. For example, there is evidence for the blocking of gate portals accompanied by re-use of the space. Principia have evidence for new activities, such as butchery, metal-working, new storage rooms, or even more domestic remains suggesting living space. Such changes are found in principia along the Wall, as at Housesteads and Vindolanda, as well as in the legionary basilica in York. In barracks, principia and praetoria there is evidence for larger rooms having walls inserted, creating smaller units of space. There are instances of barracks being demolished, as well as the demolition and/or conversion of horrea for other functions. The 4th century courtyard house at South Shields, presumed to be the praetorium, may have been a furniture workshop in its final phase after AD 400. 44 Different building techniques were also employed, for example with increasing use of earth and/or timber, and it is notable that at many forts, the latest road pavements show a marked decrease in quality. As well as these changes to the internal spaces of buildings, the use of space within the fort also saw a number of changes. New building refurbishments could extend onto the former road space, and patterned coin loss at some sites suggest marketplace activities occurring inside the fort walls.

While these trends can be found at nearly every Roman fort occupied in the 4th century and later in the northern frontier of Britain, there is very little consistency in terms of the frequency in which these trends were applied at any given site, and the dating of these activities vary between sites. Table 2, for example, provides a summary of granaries at sites along Hadrian’s Wall where the granaries were converted or demolished in the later 4th century or after. 45 Even among a handful of sites, there is no clear agreement in regard to dating when these changes were implemented. In general, some significant changes can be attributed to the 3rd century, for example the blocking of some gate portals; however, most of the trends noted above occurred in the mid- and later-4th century, typically after c. 360. While these trends are broadly consistent with a later 4th and 5th century date, each site has its own history and

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In addition, there is evidence from a number of sites that occupation continued into (and probably far into) the 5th and 6th centuries. The sequence of timber halls at Birdoswald, succeeding the demolished granaries is perhaps the most well-known, but there is post-Roman use and occupation of granaries at Vindolanda and South Shields. Sequences from praetoria, namely those at South Shields, Vindolanda, and Binchester demonstrate a drastically changed use for much of the commanding officers’ homes in the decades surrounding 400 (fig. 4). What is significant, and arguably links the occupation of the post-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Granary</th>
<th>First built</th>
<th>Subsequent changes</th>
<th>TPQ of changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Shields</td>
<td>forecourt</td>
<td>early 3rd c</td>
<td>fire damaged?</td>
<td>late 3rd c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>opus signinum surface laid</td>
<td>early 4th c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>subfloor infilled</td>
<td>5th c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>demolished, quarried, and subsequent paving</td>
<td>c. 370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>late 2nd/early 3rd c</td>
<td>subfloor infilled, opus signinum floor laid, timber porch added</td>
<td>late 3rd/early 4th c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>west</td>
<td>late 2nd/early 3rd c</td>
<td>subfloor infilled, trench hearth inserted</td>
<td>5th c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>demolished, drain inserted through foundations</td>
<td>c. 370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housesteads</td>
<td>Hadrianic</td>
<td>120s</td>
<td>north granary collapse?</td>
<td>late 2nd/early 3rd c</td>
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<td></td>
<td>bldg XV</td>
<td>late 3rd/early 4th c</td>
<td>loss of eastern end to new bathblock</td>
<td>c. 350?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vindolanda</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>c. 211</td>
<td>new floor laid</td>
<td>3rd c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>west</td>
<td>c. 211</td>
<td>new structure reuses southern portion</td>
<td>5th c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>demolition?</td>
<td>c. 400?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>rebuilt</td>
<td>c. 275</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>demolition?</td>
<td>c. 300</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reduced size to southern portion</td>
<td>c. 400?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birdoswald</td>
<td>north</td>
<td>c. 205</td>
<td>subfloor modifications</td>
<td>3rd c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>south</td>
<td>c. 205</td>
<td>subfloor modifications</td>
<td>late 3rd c</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>west end subfloor infilled</td>
<td>late 3rd c</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>roof collapse at east end of building</td>
<td>c. 350</td>
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<td>west end roof collapse, robbing, and dumping</td>
<td>c. 350</td>
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<td>1st timber building</td>
<td>c. 390</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd timber building</td>
<td>5th/6th c</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>entire subfloor infilled</td>
<td>late 3rd c</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>subsequent refloorings</td>
<td>c. 360</td>
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<td>roof collapse</td>
<td>c. 390</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>central section subfloor infilled</td>
<td>5th c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Summary of changes to granaries at selected Wall forts in the late Roman period.

chronology, reinforcing the notion that these are widespread changes occurring within the military communities of the northern frontier rather than impositions as a consequence of a single event like a large-scale settlement of foederati.

In addition, there is evidence from a number of sites that occupation continued into (and probably far into) the 5th and 6th centuries. The sequence of timber halls at Birdoswald, succeeding the demolished granaries is perhaps the most well-known, but there is post-Roman use and occupation of granaries at Vindolanda and South Shields. Sequences from praetoria, namely those at South Shields, Vindolanda, and Binchester demonstrate a drastically changed use for much of the commanding officers’ homes in the decades surrounding 400 (fig. 4). What is significant, and arguably links the occupation of the post-

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46 Wilmott 1997.
48 Collins, in press.
Roman phases to the Roman phases is that the buildings are adapted, or demolished and replaced in a piecemeal fashion. This arguably suggests some continuity of population.

Identifying discrete categories of archaeological and textual evidence is a useful exercise, in that it enables a more direct confrontation to be made between expectations of what is classified as ‘military’ and what actual evidence is for military presence. At one level, there is a tension between expectations of institutional standardisation and regional variation, often implicitly intertwined with the significance of production, distribution, and supply.

Military metalwork from the Wall and broader northern frontier zone demonstrates an awareness of the new forms and styles favoured by the Late Roman army on the European mainland, but it also appears to be produced locally. In contrast, forts tend to retain a relict appearance, with important modifications made to key buildings such as the *principia*, *praetoria*, and granaries that initially seem out of place in a military context. But a longer-term perspective argues for these changes to be seen as acceptable and ‘natural’ developments from the garrisons of the 3rd and early 4th centuries. The similarity of these changes across the region, though following individual site histories, also supports the notion of these changes as part of a regional phenomenon. Mortuary data, while sparse, also seems to be in agreement with a consistent regional pattern, which tends toward unfurnished inhumation or inhumation in a cist grave. Exceptions to this rule can be linked to graves that are associated with a more diverse and urban-based community, as at Shorden Brae (Corbridge) and Scorton (Catterick). Significantly, the lack of numerous furnished inhumation cemeteries associated with a fort or other military site severs the crucial link between the Late Roman army and mortuary data that has been established along the Rhine and Danube frontiers. This further underscores the very cogent arguments that these furnished inhumations need to be understood as aspects of elite competition at the local level.49 The widespread absence of this mortuary rite in northern Britannia in the late 4th and 5th centuries is therefore even more significant – the region had not destabilised at the social or political level that has been suggested for the lower and middle Rhine.

Aspects related to military supply further underscore that northern Britain should be understood as a cohesive region. The primary supplier of ceramics in the later 4th and early 5th century were the potteries of East Yorkshire, with kilns supplying calcite-gritted coarsewares and the finewares of the Crambeck industry.50 These fabrics and their latest forms are found distributed across a range of sites in the greater Yorkshire region, but beyond this they are predominantly found on military sites, including the west coast of Cumbria. This distribution suggests that the Yorkshire ceramics were strongly tied to military supply in the 4th and early 5th centuries.

In contrast, the distribution and numbers of the latest coinage in the northern frontier highlight intraregional variation.51 Towns have the greatest number of coins, fully supporting the idea of the town as a commercial centre. But the military sites have to be separated between those along Hadrian’s Wall, and those forts south of the Wall. The Wall sites have relatively small amounts of the latest Theodosian coinage of 388–402, while the military sites south of the Wall generally have greater numbers, at least for those east of the Pennine Hills. Seemingly at odds with the other military sites, the Yorkshire coastal fortlets have rather high numbers of the latest coins, particularly given the relatively small size in contrast to the larger forts in the region.

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49 Halsall 2000; Theuws 2009.
50 Bidwell/Croom 2010.
51 See Esmonde Clear, this volume, table 1.
How can we explain this apparent discrepancy? It is best rationalised relative to notions of military pay and supply, as well as where coins have a functional utility. Taking the Wall sites first, it should be remembered that nearly all the Wall sites had been occupied since the early 2nd century, with long-standing networks for supply and provision. By the second half of the 4th century, much of a soldier’s pay was in kind rather than in cash via the *annona militaris*, and there may have been limited opportunities for spending cash within a fort settlement; cash exchanges were more likely to take place in towns. The forts south of the Wall are often, though not always, associated with towns outside the walls of the fort, and this probably explains the higher number of coins at these sites. But does that mean that there were great commercial opportunities to be had at the Yorkshire coastal fortlets, where there is the highest concentration of the latest coinage? Probably not, but the coin numbers here likely reflect payment relative to supply; the coastal fortlets were new installations without long-established supply networks, and so payment to soldiers at these locations may have been easier to produce in cash than in kind.

There are clear exceptions for this explanation of coin distribution relative to taxation, use, and pay. The fort at Binchester has relatively high levels of the latest coinage, but does not seem to have a large extramural settlement or town associated with it by the late 4th century. However, recent excavations have underscored the results of excavations from the 1970s-80s that demonstrate very high levels of cattle butchery at the site from the mid-4th century on. Binchester may be a fort related to aspects of military supply rather than purely tactical and strategical applications of force – a regional *fabrica* if you will.

If all the archaeological evidence is considered holistically, a case can be made that demonstrates a clear regional cohesion for the northern frontier, from the Wall south to the line of the Humber estuary. Unsurprisingly but crucially, this corresponds to the command of the *dux Britanniam* in Chapter 40 of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, though this is not to say there is perfect agreement between the *dux’s* command in the *Notitia* and the archaeology. There are discrepancies, for example in the number of military sites that have evidence for late 4th and early 5th century occupation that are not attested in the *Notitia*. But these highlight the problems with the *Notitia* rather than the archaeology. If the arguments made above about intraregional variation in the evidence from military sites can be explained relative to the economics of military supply and pay, then a key factor in the development of regionally distinctive archaeological signatures can be identified and tested.

Crucially, the archaeological evidence needs to be assessed divorced from expectations or presumptions established by textual sources and subsequent historical narratives. For the northern frontier of Britain, Gildas’ account of complete military withdrawal under Maximus is at odds with the archaeological evidence, which demonstrates that occupation of fort sites continued into the 5th century. It is feasible that Maximus withdrew some soldiers from the northern frontier region; certainly his coinage reached the Wall. But there is no clear link between Constantine III and the northern frontier. It is significant that none of his coinage has been found in the frontier zone, in contrast to its presence in southern Britain in hoards and as single finds. We can identify the occupation at forts as military on the basis of the consistency of small finds that suggest military supply (e.g. ceramics) and identity (e.g. brooches), *contra* Esmonde Cleary (this volume).

But who were the soldiers occupying the northern frontier? Were they normal *limitanei*, the descendants of the auxiliary units that garrisoned the frontier in the early empire, as purported in the *Notitia*...
Dignitatum? Or were the occupants new foederati soldiers, as Halsall has argued? In other frontier sectors, notably along the Rhine, the presence of soldiers of barbarian extraction is usually inferred from artefacts found in furnished inhumations, or more rarely from the military site itself. For northern Britannia in the late 4th and early 5th century, there are no diagnostic artefacts that signal a large-scale barbarian presence, Pictish or Germanic, despite an unambiguous statement that a 'large and strong force' of Alamanni was sent to Britain in 372. Hunter has argued that some objects found in the frontier zone may reflect Pictish settlement or recruitment within the Roman diocese of Britain, but these occur in such low numbers that while the presence of individual or perhaps small unit (ie family) migration can be accepted, the argument for large-scale resettlement of entire barbarian communities cannot be sustained. The evidence, therefore, suggests the continued presence of the limitanei through the 'end' of Roman Britain into the early-mid 5th century; the dating evidence and stratigraphy is ambiguous enough that the occupation could feasibly continue to an even later date.

8 CONCLUSION

Notably, I have focused on the northern frontier zone of Britannia, arguing for two key points. First, the archaeological evidence indicates a regionally cohesive material signature, one in which the military sites can be distinguished as different from non-military sites. Second, the archaeological evidence supports the model of warband transformation which saw the uninterrupted occupation of the limitanei through the 4th century and into the 5th century, beyond the accepted political separation of Britain from the empire c. 410. Admittedly, the northern frontier of Britain does not look the same as other Late Roman frontiers, underscoring the significance of the regional unit as well as the tension between regional diversity and larger scale homogeneity expected of the Roman army and/or empire.

The northern frontier of Britain can offer a useful comparison for other regions, particularly in terms of reassessment not only of the evidence, but the presumptions underlying our interpretive frameworks. Lacking a rich record of furnished inhumation cemeteries, the structural evidence from forts and other military installations has to be interrogated for evidence of the social dynamics of the Late Roman army. Similarly, fewer furnished inhumations results in fewer examples of military metalwork. Critical assessment of brooches and belt equipment has highlighted that behind the distribution are further questions related to production and dissemination. Indeed, the rapid accumulation of new data over the past 20 years across northern and western Europe highlights the need for a critical reassessment of the origins and associations of a range of artefact classes. To what extent can we still confidently identify any barbarian group by a single type of object? Equally, can we identify or should we distinguish between 'official' military metalwork, local production and non-official copying of such metalwork? What is 'barbarian' and what is 'military'? Ideally, addressing these questions enables us to reassess the subtleties and nuances of our data, disentangling the melange of interpretive issues that complicate our conceptualisation of the later Roman West.

55 Halsall 2012.  
56 Amm. Marc. 29.4.7.  
57 Hunter 2010.
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