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Social identity and the duality of structure in late Roman-period Britain

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ABSTRACT

The central theme of this article is the relationship between material practices, social identity categories and the duality of structure. The latter concept, linking structure and agency in Giddens' structuration theory, is here understood as dependent upon the negotiation of categories, such as ethnicity/community, social status, religion and gender, through practices like dwelling, eating and appearing. Such practices can be interpreted from the material patterns that emerge from multi-dimensional and multi-scalar analyses of archaeological data. These ideas are worked through in a case study of Britain in the fourth and early fifth centuries AD, wherein some of the relationships between practices and institutionalized identities (such as those associated with the military) can be discerned. An emphasis on the negotiation of identities in practice also places the theme of temporality at centre-stage, offering a new perspective on the balance between reproduction and transformation in the ongoing constitution of social life.

**KEYWORDS**

identity • materiality • practice • Roman-period Britain • structuration

■ INTRODUCTION: STRUCTURATION, ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE LATE ROMAN MILITARY

The aim of this article is to explore the interpretative potential of Anthony Giddens' 'structuration theory' for understanding late Roman-period Britain, and in so doing develop some of the key tenets of that body of theory. In particular, the negotiation of social identity, through material practices, will be placed in a central role within the duality of structure, providing a critical element of linkage between structure and agency. Later in this introductory section, some of these theoretical points of departure will be discussed in a little more depth, but first it is necessary to say something about the research upon which this article is based.

The ideas presented here are, perhaps surprisingly, the outcome of an investigation conducted into certain aspects of the Roman army in Britain (Gardner, 2001a), specifically during what is usually taken to be the last century or so of occupation, i.e. the fourth and early fifth centuries AD. At several fort sites of this period, the 'character' of occupation has often been considered problematic, and perhaps indicative of a changing ratio of soldiers and civilians, or even of military withdrawal followed by civilian 'squatting' (Boon, 1972: 66–70; Daniels, 1980: 189; Wilkes, 1961: 289). The importance of these issues to understanding both the military as an institution of the later Roman empire, and the transformation of Britain from 'Roman' to 'post-Roman', led me to undertake an extensive comparison of material culture assemblages from different kinds of site in the period concerned. It quickly became clear, however, that defining 'military' assemblages was not a simple empirical problem, but rather the nexus of a whole cluster of issues relating to social life in this context. To attempt to label any material culture in a particular way is to ascribe an identity to it, which immediately forces a confrontation with different kinds of identity and different processes of identification. And if we seek to understand these as active products of past social agency, rather than as wholly contemporary attributes of material, which can never be used to speak to past lives, then the role of identification in the reproduction and transformation of social life must also be considered. It is with regard to the latter concern that structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) is particularly appropriate, but also open to modification.

Such issues have rarely been considered in the context of Roman military archaeology. This field has been dominated by the relatively narrow concerns of equipment studies and military history (heavily bound up, in the late imperial context, with questions of 'decline and fall'). Even the more 'social' aspects of military life have tended to be treated in a very normative and structure-centric fashion, based largely on the available (bureaucratic) documentary sources, rather than other forms of material culture (e.g. Spiedel, 1990; cf. Haynes, 1999: 8). Only very recently have wider and more theoretically-informed perspectives been used, with increasing success, to break out of the traditional framework, with work on themes such as the experience of warfare and the nature of military communities (e.g. Alston, 1995; Goldsworthy, 1996; Haynes, 1999; James, 1999). These developments are helping to re-integrate military archaeology into the wider discipline of Roman studies, from which it became increasingly isolated during the 1990s as many scholars – quite rightly – rejected the traditional emphasis of this particular subject and the way it infected many more mainstream accounts of the Roman period (e.g. Frere, 1987; cf. Scott, 1993). Many new Roman archaeologies are now being written, in which institutions like the military have an important role to play.

As might be expected, Giddens' theory of structuration has appeared in some of the work which constitutes the 'post-processual' phase of Roman studies (e.g. Grahame, 2000; Revell, 1999), though has not penetrated as deeply as in other areas of archaeology (e.g. Barrett, 1994, 2001; Dobres, 2000). Before elaborating upon this theory in more general terms, it is worth noting a couple of points about its deployment in archaeological thinking. Although archaeologists have incorporated structuration theory into their work in a range of exciting ways, often in combination with other elements of the theoretical diversity characteristic of contemporary practice (e.g. Gosden, 1994; Mizoguchi, 2000; Shennan, 1996), they have not been so successful at communicating these developments outside the discipline. Symptomatic of this is that in a very recent review of the impact of structuration theory in the social sciences, archaeology does (unusually) merit a mention, but based on only two references, from 1988 and 1989 (Bryant and Jary, 2001a: 48). Clearly, archaeologists need to be contributing more positively to the debates upon which they have drawn so heavily. I believe this can be done by working more fully through the ideas behind such debates in different contexts to those of modernity, and thus offering perspectives on how cultural diversity – and materiality – can inform general understandings of human social life.

Before embarking on an attempt to do just this, it is worthwhile to sketch an outline of the theoretical background, familiar as it may be to some readers, as well as some of the critiques of Giddens' ideas that have been developed both outside and inside of archaeology. As pursued through three major works (Giddens, 1976 [1993], 1979, 1984), structuration theory



is fundamentally an attempt to overcome the dualism between micro and macro sociology – between agency and structure, or interaction and institution. Central to this project is the ‘duality of structure’, through which Giddens seeks to place a mutually constitutive relationship between human agency and social structure at the heart of social life. An important corollary of this relationship is the significance of time-space to structuration theory, since it emphasizes that the constitution of society is an *on-going process*. Social formations are both produced and reproduced through the on-going conduct of knowledgeable actors. Obviously, there are many other facets to this body of thought that merit attention, but the one to which I would like to draw attention in the context of this article is the stratification model of the human agent. By distinguishing between practical and discursive consciousness (dealing with practices that are routine and are simply done, and practices that are actively considered), Giddens offers an important way of dealing with certain issues of social identity, as we will see later.

However, identity does not occupy a significant place in Giddens’ own writings on structuration theory (forming an independent focus in a very modern context in some later work, e.g. 1991a). Discussion of this theme is restricted to an account of social roles as ‘positioning’, situating the conduct of actors according to their identity within a social network (Giddens, 1984: 83–6). The purpose of this article is to greatly expand the importance of identity within the structuration framework, as providing a necessary mediating element within the duality of structure. Such a move has been suggested by Richard Jenkins (1996: 20, 26), though its potential has yet to be fully explored. Certain other critiques of Giddens’ work are also relevant in this context. Foremost among these are problems to do with his conceptualization of time-space, and thus with the relationship between reproduction and transformation. While Giddens has done a great deal to introduce these themes into the heart of social theory (Urry, 1991), and has expressed a desire to do more (Giddens, 1991b: 205–6), there are limitations inherent in his reliance on time-geography (e.g. Giddens, 1984: 110–19). In particular, time-space remains a somewhat abstract container for action, rather than a medium/outcome of it, and this inhibits understanding of the transformative aspects of structuration, while emphasizing the reproductive (Adam, 1990: 25–30; Gregory, 1989; Urry, 2000a: 427–9). This, again, is something that a focus on the practice of identities can help us to overcome.

The reproduction/transformation problem is most apparent in Giddens’ comments on ‘traditional’ societies, and here we can also draw upon some points of criticism from within the archaeological literature (e.g. Meskell, 1999: 26). For Giddens, tradition is a powerful force in pre-class societies (his categories of ‘Tribal’ and ‘Class-divided’ societies), representing strongly routinized action over which little discursive questioning

is exercised (Giddens, 1984: 181–3, 200). In this regard, his work is influenced by Lévi-Strauss' understanding of 'cold', unchanging societies, characterized by the 'reversible' time of repetitive ritual or myth (Adam, 1990: 27–8). Such an approach to non-western/pre-Modern cultures is clearly inappropriate, as the case study presented here will demonstrate (cf. Meskell, 1999: 26), and while tradition is an important concept it can only be understood in relation to fluidity or mobility (Gardner, 2001a: 272–5, 2001b: 38–44; cf. Urry, 2000b). An equally important critique of Giddens' approach to structuration is that, despite his emphasis on practices, he offers little theorization of the material/embodied aspects of these (Barrett and Fewster/McFadyen, 2000; Meskell, 1999: 25–6). This is clearly something that archaeologies of practice can address, as it is hoped the following will show.

In summary, structuration theory offers much to archaeology, but archaeologists can offer something in return. Amongst the many disciplines within which Giddens' work has found application (Bryant and Jary, 2001a), archaeology furnishes a real opportunity to explore the parameters of social ontology, both in the breadth of its cultural referents and in its potential for interpretation of the materialities of practice. In this article, I will focus on the latter dimension, and in arguing that social identity is a vital element of the meaning content of such practices, will provide a way of linking this theme to the duality of structure. In particular, I will make use of the distinction between nominal (labelled) and virtual (lived) aspects of identity categories, and the idea of an internal-external dialectic of identification (for individuals *and* groups), both developed by Jenkins (1996). These dovetail particularly well with Giddens' practical and discursive aspects of consciousness, allowing us to see how identities can be variously latent or salient in different contexts of interaction. In pursuing this agenda, I will begin by discussing certain aspects of the material to hand and how, at a small scale, this can be interpreted in terms of practices. Then, I will address the relationship of these to different kinds and levels of identification. Finally, I will focus on the processual relationship between practices, identities and the reproduction and transformation of social life.

■ ARCHAEOLOGIES OF ACTION

Material problems and patterns

As noted above, the research upon which this article is based involved an extensive survey of material culture assemblages from a wide selection of sites in Britain, of primarily fourth century date (Gardner, 2001a). This is a period with a rich and diverse range of archaeological material – so diverse, in fact, that it has been variously interpreted as the 'golden age' of Roman



Britain (de la Bédoyère, 1999), isolated from the troubles of the wider western empire, or as very much part of those troubles, caught up in the 'decline' of Roman culture (Faulkner, 2000). While it is not possible to present this material in any great detail here – and in any case a small selection of examples will suffice for the purposes of this discussion (see

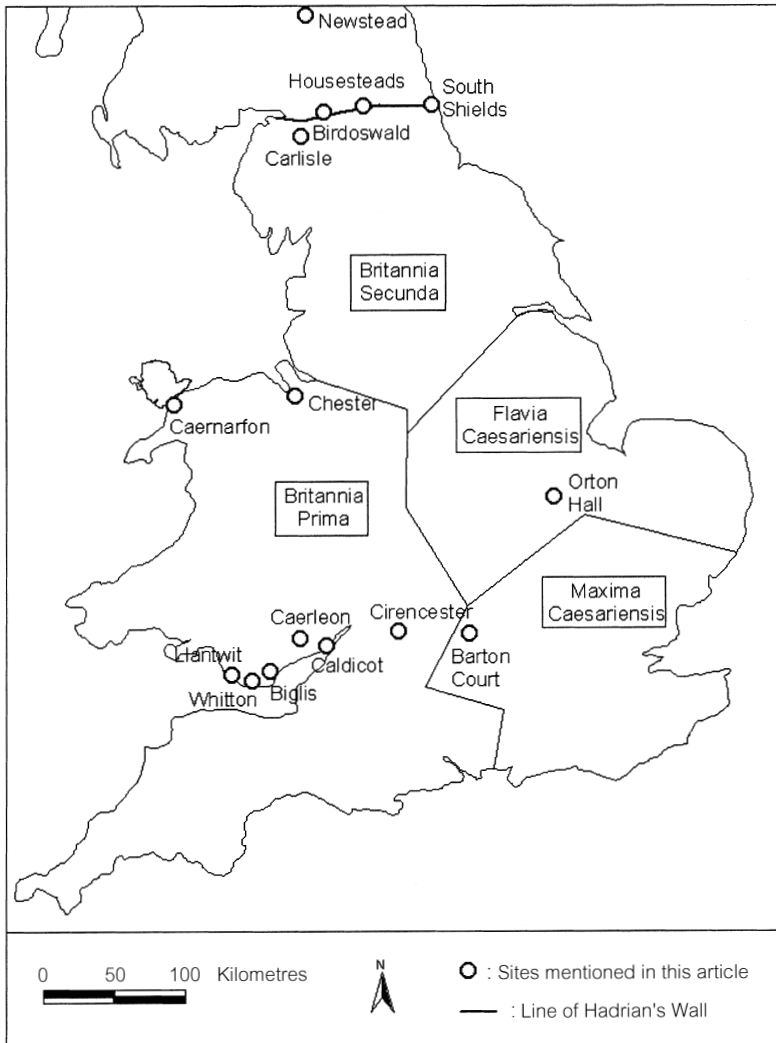


Figure 1 General location map of sites mentioned in this article. Also shown are the names and approximate boundaries of the provinces within the diocese of the Britains, in the early fourth century (after Millett, 1990: 134)

below) – a summary of the broad sweep of patterning is necessary. It is important to stress here that the interpretation of the relationships between different social identities in this period – or indeed any other – is dependent upon the comparison of material culture of all kinds, from all kinds of site. Because the problems of understanding the occupation of fourth century forts connect into wider social dynamics, it is vital to contextualize them within the contemporary and antecedent social landscape of Roman-period Britain. Equally, the multi-dimensional nature of social life can only be explored through a multi-dimensional approach to material culture, encompassing stratigraphy and the built environment, and all of the major categories of artefacts, in this case pottery, coins, small finds and faunal remains. Analysis of these at a range of scales of resolution produces a series of patterns, which, thanks to the evidence of particular activities found in the most detailed cases, can be interpreted in terms of meaningful practices.

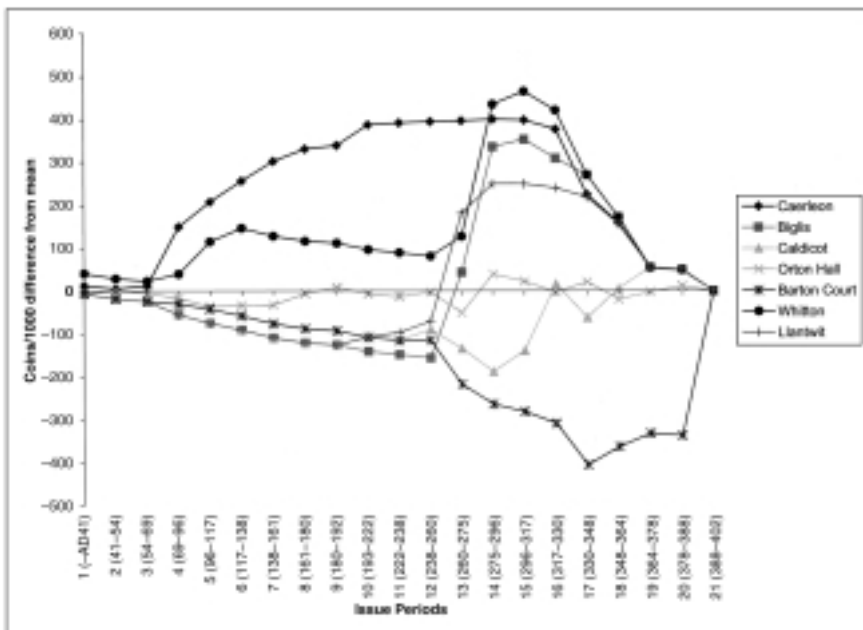


Figure 2 An example of coin-loss patterns over time. Following the methods of Reece (1995), the curves represent cumulative coin-loss through time (divided into 21 coin-issue periods) measured against an average for Britain. The fortress of Caerleon is initially distinguished by above-average loss, but merges with some of the patterns for other sites (in this case farms) later in the Roman period, particularly from the late third century. (Data from Boon, 1988a, b; Esmonde Cleary, 1996; Gardner, 2001a: 835, 841–2 [see also Gardner, 1999]; King, 1986; Reece, 1991: 26)



Focusing for now on the most general level, a considerable range of variation in coin-loss patterns is indicated across the British provinces (see Figure 1), when these are analysed using the methods developed by Reece (1995). These seem less related to specifically site-typological (e.g. fort, town) factors as to regional and historical trends, such that although forts were the early foci of coin-using activity, this distinctiveness sooner or later gave way to a more diverse picture (Figure 2). This quite possibly represents different coin-using practices in different parts of Britain. Examining pottery and faunal remains, which can be connected through practices relating to eating (cf. Meadows, 1994: 136), is more difficult, as these have been excavated and recorded with a great deal less consistency than coins. Nonetheless, an important series of tensions between local and regional patterns is suggested by the prominence of localized manufacture/supply of both pots and livestock, and localized variation in their use, within a fairly consistent overall norm dominated by certain forms of vessel, and by cattle among the animal species (cf. King, 1999; Stallibrass,

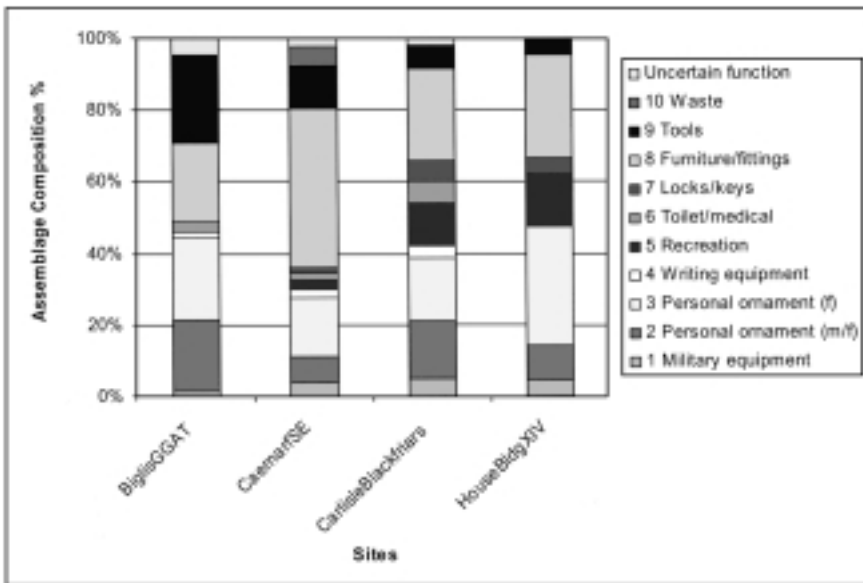


Figure 3 An example of gross small finds patterning across a range of sites: a farm (Biglis) and a fort (Caernarfon) in Wales, and a town (Carlisle) and fort (Housesteads) in the Hadrian's Wall zone. The same broad groupings of personal objects (categories 2 and 3) and general fittings (category 8) tend to dominate all assemblages, which are here not chronologically sub-divided. (Data from Caruana, 1990: 105–62; Casey et al., 1993: 165–228; Parkhouse, 1988: 53–63; Wilkes, 1961: 294–8; categories after Cool et al., 1995: 1626–47)

2000; Tyers, 1996: 70–80). Similarly, small finds seem to appear across a great range of sites in a fairly uniform distribution of functional categories (e.g. personal items, general fittings, tools, see Figure 3; cf. Cool et al., 1995: 1626–47), within which particular localized (site-specific) depositional environments can be singled out.

These artefact distributions suggest complex patterns of similarity and difference, though not clearly along ‘military’/‘civilian’ lines (insofar as these might be regarded as distinguishing different categories of sites, i.e. forts from towns or farms). Similar conclusions emerge from an analysis of the spatial dynamics of different kinds of site, both in terms of their architecture and of the depositional environments created by practices such as rubbish disposal. Despite formal differences between the built environments of some kinds of sites and/or specific structures, many examples of all types changed in the fourth century to emphasize local priorities and senses of ‘place’, as will be explored in more detail below. While this often involved shifts in the location of rubbish deposition, analysis of earlier phases suggests that some judgements of the late Roman period as uniquely ‘squalid’ (e.g. Faulkner, 2000: 123–6) are misplaced, as dumping close to living spaces – again, on various kinds of site – could be prolific well before this time. In any case, these patterns of similarity and difference within the material culture of Britain can be further contextualized through comparison with extant written texts from the broader Roman world.

In these, which include personal, bureaucratic and literary documents, discourses of identification can be examined to highlight the ways in which writers could construct reified, abstract identities from much more fluid and complex social situations (cf. Gardner, 2001c). This will be particularly important in the consideration of nominal aspects of identification below, but can also be seen to resonate with the tensions between local variations and more global norms in the material just described. Overall, the overlapping patterns in this material culture explode the idea of a simply-defined ‘military’ assemblage, in opposition to a ‘civilian’ one. Rather – and in keeping with much recent work on identification (e.g. Jones, 1997) – the complexity of human identities, as negotiated through material cultures (including writing), is indicated by cross-cutting patterns in different fields of activity. As we will see in the next section, the more detailed of these patterns allow us to gain purchase on how this negotiation actually worked in terms of specific practices, and thus to penetrate to the heart of the duality of structure: the relationship between interactions and institutions.

Identification through practice

While some of the trends described in broad terms above may be accountable for in terms of a range of post-depositional or other factors, they gain



in interpretative strength partly through the variety of sites and materials considered (with overlapping patterns of similarity and difference), and partly through the smaller-scale analyses which offer real insights into localized activities. These are the key to understanding even the more aggregative patterns in terms of meaningful practices, and thus of the reproduction and transformation of identities. One of the sites with sufficiently detailed stratigraphic and artefactual information for such purposes is the south-east quadrant of the fort at Caernarfon, in north-west Wales (Figures 4 and 5;

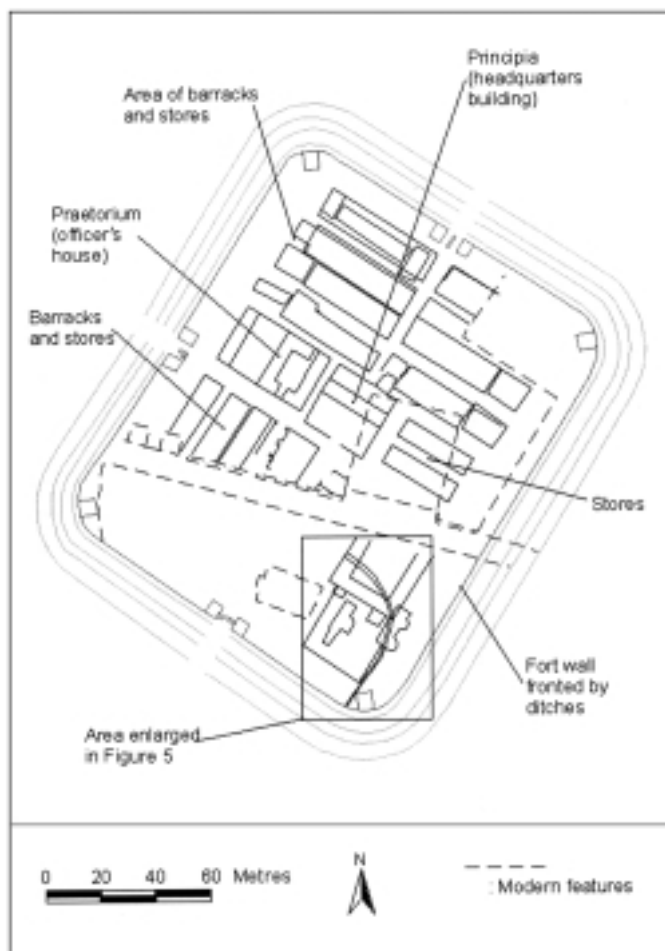


Figure 4 General plan of the fort at Caernarfon, illustrating both the location of the area shown in more detail in Figure 5, and common elements of the planning of such sites (e.g. the *principia*, the *praetorium*, and areas of barracks/stores). (Plan after Casey et al., 1993: 8; Wheeler, 1924: f.p. 186)

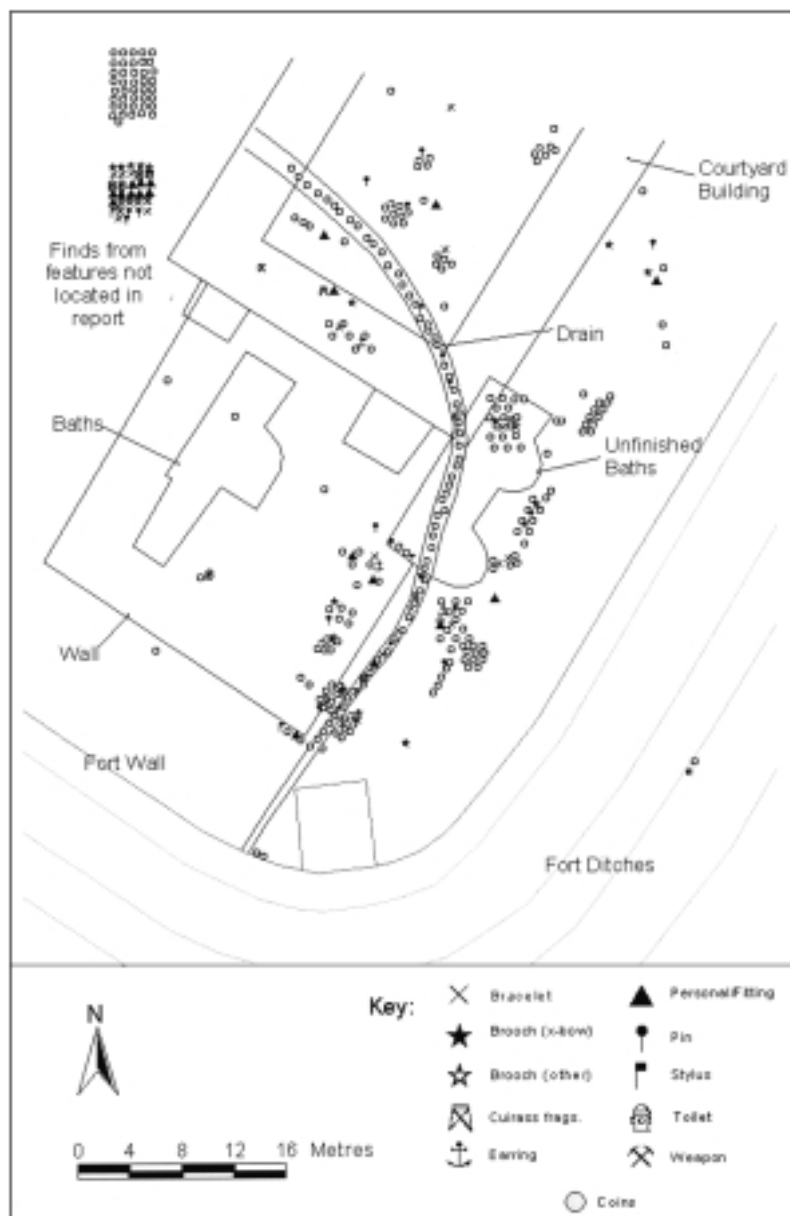


Figure 5 Overview of the distribution of coins and identifiable small finds in the south-east quadrant of Caernarfon. Artefacts are plotted in the general area of their depositional context, spread out for clarity. (Background plan after Casey et al., 1993: 8; Wheeler, 1924: f.p. 186; data from lists in Casey et al., 1993: 165–228)



Casey et al., 1993). During the fourth century, this part of the fort was given over, for something like 80 years, to a range of activities of individually short duration. Compared with the rest of the fort (Wheeler, 1924), this area was open and previous structures on the site (barracks, a courtyard house and two bath-blocks) were demolished or disused. This remained so for two or three generations of the fort's inhabitants, over which time it was nonetheless used for the disposal of rubbish (both by dumping and the digging of pits), and for the small-scale manufacture of artefacts. Despite the lack of architectural order, then, this became a place of routine practices and associations, with only occasional disturbances, such as the insertion of a long drain across the site in the latter part of the century.

The artefacts deposited here included a considerable number of coins and small finds. These each had individual biographies, doubtless involving many other places than that in which they ended up. Nonetheless, their characteristics of temporality and functionality allow us to understand some of the dynamic practices within which these objects were engaged. The most immediate practice-contexts we can discuss are those surrounding their deposition. These kinds of artefacts generally occur in pit- and ditch-fills and dumps, apparently constituting mixed rubbish deriving from elsewhere (and not obviously in 'structured deposits', which are known at some other fort sites, e.g. Newstead; Clarke and Jones, 1996). Where they are intrinsically dateable, many of the objects seem to have been old when dumped, although of course the 'measured' age of an object need not correspond with a past individual's 'experienced' age for it (see Gosden, 1994: 2 for this temporal distinction), and redeposition must also be considered. Nonetheless, there are indications, from this site and others, that coins were disposed of with greater frequency in the fourth century, and this represents a transformation in the temporal relations between people and at least one category of things (and perhaps the empire they represent). The temporality of other artefacts is harder to grasp, but gradual change is suggested by the emergence of some new styles, for example of brooches, within a generally conservative overall repertoire.

From a functional perspective, the coins and predominantly 'personal' small finds can be associated with certain practices, although this is not to pre-judge their meaning content within the execution of those practices. That of the coins will have varied according to their locally-specific exchange value at a particular time, and also their significance in terms of the user's perceived relationship to the political entity in whose name they were struck. The increased rate of discard referred to above is suggestive of certain limits in both areas. The quantities of personalia (brooches, belt-fittings, bracelets and so on; see Figure 6) arguably reflect a concern on the part of the inhabitants with practices of 'appearing'. In conjunction with particular forms of clothing, these different objects attest to differentiated identities within the community, whether these be on the basis of gender, status or authority, or

wealth. At the same time, since objects of all different kinds were mixed in final disposal – and indeed probably in contexts of initial loss – there were clearly established practices, which carried across these materialized or embodied differences, not just in refuse dumping, but in habitation too.

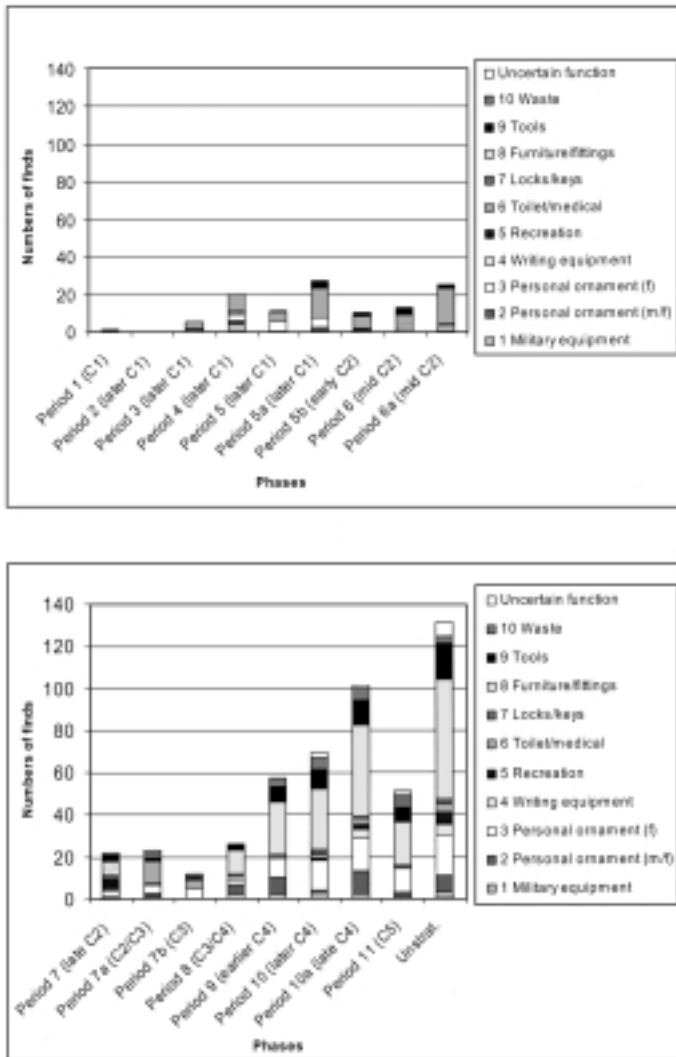


Figure 6 Functional breakdowns of the small finds assemblage at Caernarfon by stratigraphic phase. Again, personal objects and generalized fittings are dominant in most of these groups. (Data from Casey et al., 1993: 165–228)



This detailed example gives some flavour of the ways in which small-scale archaeological data can be conceptualized in terms of practice-contexts. Based on the analysis of this particular case, and a range of others (e.g. Birdoswald [Wilmott, 1997]; South Shields [Bidwell and Speak, 1994]), a loose typology of practices can be suggested, including exchanging, appearing, dwelling, working and eating, to which might also be added writing. These can be linked to the production and reproduction of social identities by exploring their interactional qualities, conceptualized by Giddens in terms of presences and absences (e.g. the co-presence of actors or the distancing/'stretching' of institutions; Giddens, 1984: 142–3; cf. Gregory, 1989), and by using Jenkins' notion of the internal-external dialectic of identification (Jenkins, 1996: 19–28). The latter posits a continuous and mutually-constitutive relationship between 'self' and 'other' in both individual and collective processes of identification. Such an approach to identity clearly resonates with the duality of structure, as the mutually-constitutive relationship between agents and structures (Giddens, 1984: 25).

Indeed, it can be argued that the dialectic of identification is critical to the working of the duality of structure, insofar as identity is what defines individuals as social beings, through their relationships of similarity and difference with others (Jenkins, 1996: 20). These relationships, which are of course complex and fluid, can nonetheless be constructed as simple and fixed (i.e. reified) – indeed must be so in order to furnish stability in many situations in social life (Jenkins, 1996: 119–25). Identities can thus be seen as the medium of the relationship between interaction and institution, which is expressed in the notion of the duality of structure. They are reproduced and transformed through the practices of actors, engaged in different kinds of interaction in time-space. At the same time, they position actors in relation to others (with differing degrees of power) in temporally- and spatially-extended institutions of different scales. They are therefore both personal and collective. Before addressing the institutional aspects of identities, it is worth illustrating briefly the relationship between their negotiation at an interactional scale and the material dimensions of practices.

This could be done with reference to any of the main practice-themes referred to above, though here I will only focus on one of the most important: dwelling. Practices associated with dwelling (such as building, maintaining, inhabiting, moving and depositing) obviously entail social interactions based around specific locales of co-presence (that is, particular face-to-face interactions in particular places with particular associations). They can also, however, reproduce highly institutionalized norms of practice, which may be 'stretched' across considerable spans of time-space. The relationship between these scales of praxis can be seen in fort sites, like Caernarfon or South Shields. Such sites were more than merely defensive, serving to construct certain norms of discipline and hierarchy to reproduce

'military' life across the empire (James, 1999: 16). At the same time, they were transformed in myriad ways by individuals and small groups, particularly during the fourth century, with modifications to different structures, to pathways between structures, and to the kinds of activities conducted in them (e.g. Bidwell and Speak, 1994: 33–46). Because of the way these changes affected interactions and the meaningful regionalization of time-space (or 'zoning'; Giddens, 1984: 119), we can draw connections between the simultaneous reproduction and transformation of institutionalized practices in routine situations, and the negotiation of different identities. To explore this in more depth we need to look at the specific content of the identities concerned.

■ INSTITUTIONS AND IDENTITIES

'Military' identities in practice and discourse

In turning from the ways in which identities are put into practice to the nature of those identities in this particular context, it is useful to consider the distinction between the nominal and virtual aspects of identification, and also to distinguish organizations as a specific form of institution. Both of these points are brought to the fore if we look more closely at the category that originated the research presented here: the Roman military. As stated above, the search for 'a military assemblage' proved not only fruitless, but misguided in its conception. Nonetheless, practices which are significant in the negotiation of 'military' identities can be isolated. This depends not only upon regarding institutionalization as an important feature of such identities (as we will see, this can also be said of other kinds of identity), but more specifically upon treating the military as possessing certain of the distinctive characteristics of organizations (Jenkins, 1996: 136–7). While all institutions entail a 'stretching' (distanciation) of practices across time-space, organizations have a specific internal-external dialectic, involving relationships of similarity and difference both at the organizational boundary (members being distinguished from non-members by recruitment procedures and some shared goals), and within it (through subdivisions of power and role). Organizations harness the essential features of institutionalization – predictability and routinization – for particular goals (Jenkins, 1996: 126–53). These features, which clearly relate to the construction of certain kinds of identity, provide us with some important pointers in defining 'military' practices.

Using the broad typology outlined above, it is indeed possible to distinguish a range of practices which may have been involved in military identification. At the same time, though, these illustrate both the complexity of intersecting institutions (on which more below), and the fractured



nature of internal organizational boundaries which, as we will see, need to be kept distinct from the specific large-scale identity category of the 'military'. As before, I will restrict discussion here to the important practice-theme of 'dwelling'. There are certainly features of forts, which, insofar as they are common across the empire, are appropriate to the military as a large-scale organizational identity-group. These include the regular boundary wall, a network of straight movement axes, a central focus of sanctified authority, and a hierarchy of dwelling-spaces. These both mark the community off from the outside, and discipline the space within (Giddens, 1984: 145–58; James, 1999: 16). However, this impression is counter-balanced by the complexity of the inhabitants. At the interactional scales dominant in the daily lives of such people, unit, rank and status identities are likely to have been more significant than an empire-wide 'militariness' (cf. James, 1999), while the boundedness of the community is blurred by the presence (indicated in the small finds data) of people within the walls who were not members in the organizational sense, but were nonetheless strongly tied to the soldiers, through relations of friendship, marriage, enslavement, clientship or kinship. Here, then, we can see the tension between reified and complex identities enacted in different aspects of dwelling practices.

It is possible to refine our understanding of this relationship further if we consider the distinction between the nominal and virtual dimensions of 'military' identification. This requires us to draw in the relevant textual evidence from the period at hand. Although this includes material ranging from private letters (e.g. the Abinnaeus Archive, from Egypt; Bell et al., 1962) and official documents (e.g. the *Notitia Dignitatum* [Seeck, 1876], a list of state offices) to historical or political literature (e.g. the work of Ammianus, an ex-soldier), none of it actually comes from Britain. Nonetheless, it can be used to address empire-wide levels of identification, like that upon which 'the military' as a category seems to operate. Indeed, this is a label with specific uses and contextual connotations in Roman-period discourses, and should be distinguished from other labelled levels of social identification, which are associated with it, such as grades of units (frontier-based *limitanei* were differentiated from the mobile field-armies, or *comitatenses*), unit titles, ranks and places of posting.

These are likely to have been more important in many micro-scale interactions involving people familiar with soldiers, but the more 'macro' scale 'military' identity was still drawn upon (and thereby reproduced) in other situations. These include the writing of the texts just referred to, as well as some of the 'organized' practices mentioned above, like fort construction. Indeed, it is worth stressing here that part of the importance of placing the concept of identity at the heart of the duality of structure lies in its power to accommodate different kinds and scales of social institution, which can be related to different contexts of interaction. This helps to counter the

problems of hierarchical 'flatness' and the denial of collective agency for which structuration theory has been rightly criticized (Parker, 2000: 105–6; cf. Mouzelis, 1995: 26–7).

In focusing on identities, a considerable degree of social complexity can be seen in the texts. In some, military identity is quite clearly distinguished from civilian, both in political affairs and daily life (e.g. Ammianus, XX.5, XXI.10), and this often entails the stereotyping of soldiers as possessing an uncouth, vulgar masculinity (e.g. Ammianus, XIV.10, XVI.12). At the same time, there can be significant blurring with other state identities (e.g. both soldiers and other state servants can be referred to as *militiae* in the Theodosian Code; Pharr, 1952: 155, fn. 23), while much more small-scale identifications, including internal organizational boundaries, are revealed to be of daily importance in the letters of the Abinnaeus Archive, which relates to the life of a unit commander (e.g. Texts 3, 13, 21, 80–82). Overall, we can conclude from these sources that the 'military' was a real – and reified – identity, which figured in various discourses as a macro-level institution, but also sat in the centre of a cluster of organizational identities, which are at least as likely to have been negotiated in material or textual constructions of similarity and difference. These are in turn likely to have been subject to considerable virtual variation.

Aspects of the relationship between the nominal and virtual dimensions of identity at such smaller social scales can be seen if we compare two of the *limitanei* forts in the Hadrian's Wall zone, Housesteads and South Shields. South Shields, as understood through a long-running series of excavations (Bidwell and Seeck, 1994; Hodgson, 1999), was rebuilt in the early fourth century with new barracks and a courtyard house, in addition to the earlier headquarters building and stores. Although there were many small-scale changes over time, at the outset this place embodied many of the institutionalized practices of military life – with all of its internal subdivisions of status and so forth – noted above. In terms of nominal identities, it seems that (from the *Notitia Dignitatum* [Seeck, 1876]) the fort was garrisoned by a fairly new unit brought in from the East, the *numerus barcariorum Tigrisiensium* (Bidwell and Speak, 1994: 42). This makes for an interesting contrast with fourth century Housesteads, where the form of the barracks (rows of semi-detached structures with more independent structural histories than at South Shields), and some of the changes in the headquarters building (Bosanquet, 1904: 208–28; Crow, 1995: 85–91), suggest a more deeply embedded attachment to the localized routines of small-group dynamics and a particular sense of place. This would be appropriate to one level of nominal identification, as here there is evidence that the fort was still garrisoned by an old-fashioned type of unit, the *cohors prima Tungrorum*, which had been in post since the second century (Crow, 1995: 56–63). Thus we can connect some of the virtual and nominal aspects of identification in specific circumstances (cf. Bidwell, 1997: 104), on levels



other than the overall 'military' categorization. These, in turn, can be related to a host of other overlapping kinds of identity.

Intersecting institutions

The expression of 'military' and associated identities, through material discourses (including writing), involved abstraction from the complexities of everyday life, in which a number of other categories of identification also played a role. The mobilization of particular identities in practice, as a phenomenon entirely dependent upon context, might involve similar artefacts in quite different negotiations, as we will see in this section. One of the most clearly apparent fields where similar practices might have a range of meanings in terms of identity is in the overlap between 'the military' and 'the state', which is indicative of the distinctive character of the Roman state when compared with many modern examples (cf. Giddens, 1984: 183; Parker, 2000: 64–5). Some indication of the ambivalence that could exist on certain nominal levels has already been given, particularly the use of the term *militiae* for soldiers and others (e.g. Theodosian Code, VII.1.5). The Abinnaeus Archive also indicates jurisdictional conflict between different kinds of state servant over tax collection (e.g. Texts 13 and 14), bringing us into the virtual dimension of 'lived' identities.

This can be pursued by looking for 'organized' practices in the fourth century British material, focusing for instance on *forum-basilica* structures in towns, whose function was, at least in theory, partly administrative. While this produces some (interestingly, quite localized) examples of potentially 'official' activities (such as a series of changes to make the complex at Cirencester more exclusive; Wachter, 1964: 9–14), it is actually not possible to determine whether other patterns within towns – such as the organized disposal of large-scale refuse deposits – result from organization on the basis of 'civil' or 'military' authority. Similarly, it is likely that certain kinds of metalwork could be worn by both armed and unarmed state servants (Ammianus, XXII.10; Swift, 2000: 44). These kinds of ambiguities reinforce the point that such identities might have been contested or differentially distinguished, depending upon the circumstances of particular interactions. Ostensibly similar practices of dwelling or appearing might have generalized 'official', or distinctive 'military' or 'civil' meanings, according to the positions of those engaging in or commenting upon them.

Even where separated, both 'military' and 'civil' state identities overlapped with a range of other categories common also to those with no 'official' status. Of course, these categories must also be seen as institutionalized, in the broad sense of being constructed and reified abstractions from the complex flow of everyday life, reproduced in the interactional practices of social actors. One of the most important of these categories is gender. In nominal terms, male and female identities, as

written in late Roman textual sources, are clearly distinct, though of course these are constructs from a particular point of view – typically that of aristocratic men. Nonetheless, there are some signs of a more complex situation in the ways in which masculinity, for example, is constructed differently for different social classes (cf. Alston, 1998). It is difficult to link any such categories specifically with practices representing the virtual dimension of gender identities, in the British context – and indeed it is quite likely that there were local differences in their construction. Even so, I would suggest that the importance of personal items to the small finds assemblages from across the full range of sites in Britain (including forts, where it is highly likely that women were resident within the walls [cf. van Driel-Murray, 1995]), combined with some of the burial evidence (Philpott, 1991: 233), indicates that gender identities were widely negotiated through such articles in practices of ‘appearing’. Of course, such items may well have been used additionally – or alternatively – as symbols of age or status in particular circumstances.

While the material practices encountered in the archaeology of fourth century Britain can, to varying degrees, be similarly associated with religious identities, I will conclude this section by focusing on more ‘ethnic’ categories. We have already seen that the macro-scale grouping of the ‘military’ was only the top tier of a hierarchy of identities, which included localized associations (e.g. a particular unit) likely to be of greater importance in many routine interactions. The ‘ethnic’ identities which figure in the written sources – such as Romans and barbarians, or Britons, Gauls and Franks – were clearly important abstractions, or stereotypes (Jenkins, 1996: 122–5), but it is important to note the scale of the discourses in which they are situated. These are generally broad narratives of imperial affairs, involving simplified comparisons between large population groups.

Such comparisons could also arise in the more common kinds of small-scale interaction. Indeed some of the material patterns described briefly above might well allow for the articulation of provincial ‘norms’ in encounters between those from different parts of the empire. However, the *variations* in such patterns are likely to have been more important in most daily interactions. These emphasize local ‘ethnic’ identities – primarily at the level of the individual community – as the most significant axis of group identification, through practices such as dwelling, eating and exchanging. This can be illustrated by the earlier comparison between Housesteads and South Shields, in which differences between military units can also be seen as differences between communities of place. Larger scales of identification certainly existed, but these would be most likely to find discursive formulation in situations of individual mobility – which are much more difficult to track in archaeological contexts. The smaller-scale community identities cross-cut the large-scale organizational affiliations of particular members of such communities, and moreover, seem to increase in importance in the



fourth century. This brings me to the final strand of the argument in this article, concerning social continuity and change.

■ IDENTITIES AND STRUCTURATION

Long-term reproduction and transformation

Having outlined something of the range of overlapping identities of significance in the context at hand, and the ways in which these provide the fabric of the relationship between interactions and institutions, it is necessary to consider how the connections between these groupings changed through time. This is the point at which it becomes clear that the negotiation of identities, through practices, generates the tension between reproduction and transformation, which is also a key feature of the duality of structure (cf. Cohen, 1989: 45). In addressing these issues, it is important to adopt a multi-scalar and multi-tempo approach, and so I will begin by attempting to place some of the patterns discussed in previous sections into a deeper temporal context. Without wishing to impose any kind of teleological framework, aspects of these patterns are pre-figured in various ways in periods preceding the fourth century. Reference has been made above, for instance, to rubbish disposal as an aspect of dwelling. It is important to note here that, while the locations chosen for such practices in the fourth century were in many cases novel, the routinized activity of dumping refuse in pits or heaps on otherwise disused spaces within settlement boundaries was common from the late first or second century (e.g. in the fortress at Chester; Strickland, 1982). This element of continuity cuts across a wide range of sites.

Other aspects of dwelling can, however, be used to argue for long-term processes of small-scale change, which seem to accelerate in the late Roman period. As noted above, many of the modifications to structures in the fourth century were rather singular, and these do appear to indicate an increased emphasis on localized communities of place (as at Housesteads) as opposed to macro-scale communities like the military (see also below, and Gardner, 2001c: 40–43). Even so, this does not mean that buildings were not altered at other points in the Roman period, and it is certainly not the case that all forts were identical in their initial design and construction. Overall, there is a dynamic balance between similarities and differences in dwelling practices through time, and this kind of tension is critical to understanding social reproduction and transformation in terms of identities. The same goes for other kinds of practices, in which various patterns can be detected from a long-term perspective. The analysis of small finds, animal bone and ceramics from a wide range of sites demonstrates that similar kinds of objects – and similar kinds of livestock or pottery – dominated many assemblages over time, though there were many variations in detail, and perhaps some significant changes in the meaning content of even

stylistically-static artefacts. More rapid change is evident in practices of exchanging – or at least in coin-loss – with a clear decline in the distinctiveness of early ‘military’ assemblages against other kinds of site, from the later third century.

Taken together, this range of patterns in different aspects of material culture implies not only that the localization of identities associated with ‘the military’ was a complex process, occurring at different rates in different fields of practice, but also that a broader balance between traditions and transformations in identities underlies the structuration of social life for all those living in Roman-period Britain. Of course, this was by no means a homogenous society, and people in different places and different social groups will have experienced both continuity and change in different ways. The common thread is that all of the identity categories referred to in the previous section were continuously open to change, by virtue of being continuously reproduced. This process, and the complex permutations of identification it generated, can be examined in more detail in the fourth century itself.

Structured change at medium and small scales

As a focus for considering the tempos and patterns of structuration within the fourth century, it is worth elaborating on some of the practices of dwelling discussed in the previous section. These display a varied range of transformations in pace and nature, some of which can be characterized as major adjustments to routines, while others are in themselves routines of modification. While it can be difficult to separate these out, thanks to the vagaries of many archaeological chronologies, we can assess the likely effect of different kinds of change on existing institutional routines. An additional factor to consider in a site-based approach such as this is the degree of settlement mobility. At many of the forts on Hadrian’s Wall, for instance, significant changes occur against the background of a stable site location and a relationship to structures of considerable relative antiquity – most obviously the Wall itself. This should not be ignored when we consider signs of transformation in particular routines, though neither should the possibility of ‘reinventions of tradition’ within a single location.

Some of the changes are certainly fairly minor, with limited organizational impact – at least superficially. Even so, they are likely to be consequential, given that unintended consequences of action can accompany any act of social reproduction (Giddens, 1984: 5). Such transformations include those to the living spaces in the barracks at Housesteads, mentioned above, where distinct rooms developed along increasingly independent trajectories (Crow, 1995: 87–8). Other cases of change seem more dramatic, such as the diminution of occupation in the courtyard house at South Shields (Bidwell and Speak, 1994: 44–5), or the disuse of the baths at Caerleon in the late third century. Nonetheless, these can still be seen against a backdrop



of continuing routines in other areas of these places, as well as the establishment of new ones – such as the long-term dumping of rubbish in the empty pools of Caerleon's baths (Zienkiewicz, 1986: 253–61). In these examples, as in many others, changes in routines associated with organizational structures of the late Roman state were increasingly common in the later fourth century, but not at the expense of all continuity or tradition. It rather seems that cumulative small-scale transformations were undermining the distancing of state structures, accommodating continued organized practices more closely to the dynamics of specific local communities.

Different tempos of change can also be constructed for the other fields of practice, which are represented in the material from Britain. In terms of exchanging, for instance, the later third century seems to represent something of a watershed for coin-use. Prior to this period, many sites display a fairly consistent curve of loss, while after this period, the picture is much more volatile and fractured (see Figure 2), with more regionally-distinctive patterns, even as coin-use seems to have become more widespread. This apparent increase in the fluidity associated with a material category closely linked to the state is important when contrasted with the evidence for practices like eating and appearing. This shows rather less intensive patterns of change, perhaps indicating a more tradition-based emphasis in the construction of certain identities, such as gender. Overall, the tempo and character of transformation in the fourth century varied between different spheres of life, different communities or regions, and different identity groups. In some ways, this does reinforce the importance of tradition in what Giddens would label a 'Class-divided' society (Giddens, 1984: 196), but it also shows that there were different kinds of tradition – as in those relating to the 'military', or those of a specific community – and that these were far from immutable. Indeed, the more obvious manifestations of transformation seem to particularly affect institutions tied to the Roman state. While this state was always ideologically more – and practically less – centralized than a modern one, these changes point to increased decentralization of state power into the fifth century. This institutional transformation was a consequence of the agency of individuals and small collectivities, enacted in the material practices described. It is within this context that the dramatic fifth century political events surrounding the end of imperial administration in Britain, alluded to so opaquely by contemporary or later writers such as Zosimus (VI.10), must be firmly placed.

■ CONCLUSION: THE POTENTIAL OF STRUCTURATIONIST ARCHAEOLOGIES

It is not my aim here to pursue the themes of this article into the complexities of fifth century archaeology in Britain, although the approach I have

outlined would certainly be of use in understanding this period more fully. To summarize the main points of the argument, I have used the archaeology of fourth century Britain as a detailed example to explore the links between material practices, social identities, and the duality of structure. I have tried to show that continuity and change – or, better, tradition and mobility – in material practices represent the temporalized manifestation of the similarities and differences between people that are the building blocks of social identities. Insofar as these identities are the interface between individuals and institutions (Jenkins, 1996: 26), they can be readily conceptualized as the fulcrum of the duality of structure, and thus as the driving force of structuration as social process. In showing how this works in terms of material practices, I hope to have contributed something to the project envisaged by Jenkins (1996: 20), as well as to the structuration framework in general.

While these general points are applicable to many social contexts, the specific context at hand has, of course, a very particular dynamic of its own, involving a particular constellation of identities. I have attempted to map

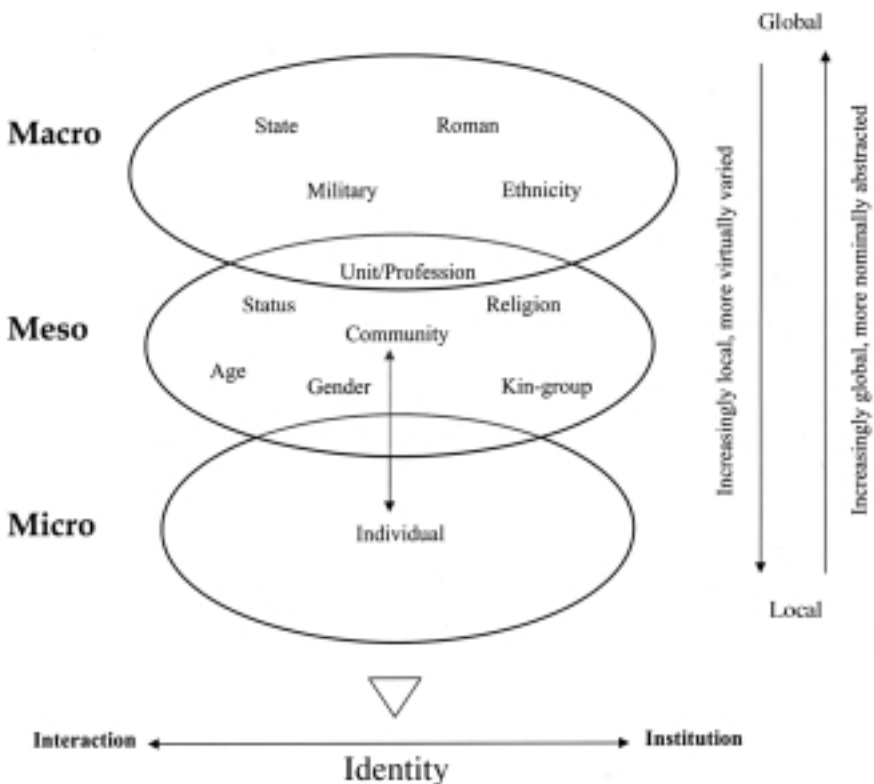


Figure 7 A stratification model of identification in late Roman-period Britain



this, in a crude fashion, in Figure 7. Here, identity is, as stated above, the connection between the interactional and institutional dimensions of social life. I have distinguished micro, meso, and macro scales of grouping, but all of these are potentially negotiable in any context, depending upon the specific circumstances of an interaction. This has a great deal to do with the familiarity of co-present individuals (Bauman, 1990: 37–41): whereas a macro-scale identity might be most salient in an encounter with a stranger, close friends are more likely to interact on the basis of their own individual identities. Even here, though, there will be context-specific variation, as friends who are also soldiers may emphasize the latter identity when interacting with other soldiers in a corporate activity (cf. Goffman, 1959 for an extended analysis of these kinds of situation).

This example gives some indication of how identities negotiated at individual scales link up to the production and reproduction of institutions. The more macro-scale identities do entail an increasing degree of abstraction from the complexities of everyday life, involving the kind of stereotyping found in historical accounts of soldiers (e.g. Ammianus, XIV.10). This does not, however, decrease their reliance upon construction through routinized material practices – indeed, quite the opposite. It is the localization of many material patterns in the later fourth century that suggests that the construction of such identities was declining in Britain, in the face of the increasingly strong connection between individuals and specific settlement communities, as indicated on Figure 7.

To conclude with a more general point, I would like to expand upon the conceptual twinning of tradition and mobility mentioned above. The dialectic between these factors mirrors that of agency and structure in the duality of structure, inasmuch as they are profoundly implicated in each other. Indeed, this connection is more than simply analogical. Tradition and mobility represent the temporal dimension of the social identities that, I have argued, are critical to the duality of structure, and therefore to social reproduction *and* transformation. Although ‘tradition’ encapsulates the idea of highly routinized practices, linking it to a concept of ‘mobility’ or fluidity allows us to explore the ways that different traditions can be selectively drawn upon and potentially changed, particularly through contact with other ways of doing things, encouraging discursive formulations of identity (whether these be spoken, textualized or materialized in some other way). This gives tradition a more potentially reflexive cast than Giddens allows (cf. Bryant and Jary, 2001b: 20–2).

Equally, ‘mobility’, which has a dual sense of movement and fluidity (cf. Urry, 2000b: 21–48), is linked with tradition in the sense that movements of people and ideas, though bringing about interactions in which new identities might be negotiated, can be highly routinized or institutionalized, as in those associated with military postings. Similarly, changes over time in one place still tend to be transformations of something, with ‘a history’. The

tensions between these factors are variable across the range of scales and dimensions of social life, but they are vital elements of social identity as an *on-going* part of the constitution of societies, entailing the *dynamic* recognition of similarity and difference. As concepts, they also encourage us to think about social life in active terms (i.e. how identities are *made fixed* and *made fluid*), in a way which the more detached ideas of continuity and change fail to do. Developing such understandings of the temporal nature of social life, which also emphasize materiality, is a key contribution that structurationist archaeologies can make to the social theories upon which they draw.

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