

5. Acculturation and continuity: re-assessing the significance of Romanization in the hinterlands of Gloucester and Cirencester

Simon Clarke

Introduction

In the past, the adoption of elements of Roman culture has often been equated rather uncritically with ‘progress’ and the emergence of a more ‘civilized’ society. Most notably the presence of large public towns and villas in the south and east of Britain has been presented as evidence for a degree of social change not experienced in the north and west. However, this view assumes first that the only social stratum of any consequence was the landed elite, and secondly that with Roman material culture came Roman social constructs. This paper will challenge these views by considering the character and distribution of settlement in the hinterlands of Gloucester (Glevum) and Cirencester (Corinium). Rather than accepting that the cultural icons of the post-Conquest elite were a ‘Good Thing’, an attempt will be made to understand the economic and cultural implications of such icons.

Conceptualizing Romanization

The concept of Romanization which remains the basic model for social change within the Roman Empire (eg Millett 1990) was first developed by Haverfield in the early-twentieth century (Haverfield 1912). Haverfield postulated a process whereby native culture gradually became more like that of Rome. At the time this model represented a major advance in academic thought, as for the first time developments in Roman Britain were not attributed primarily to immigrants from the Mediterranean, but to *adaptations* by the indigenous Britons. The process was manifested archaeologically by radical changes in the artefact assemblage and the character of buildings, but was believed to have gone much further, fundamentally altering the structure of society. It was envisaged that the process of Romanization would have involved adoption of a whole range of new behavioural patterns, but of central importance was the development of a new economic system, based on commercial exchange using coinage. Successful elements within society were seen as having moved away from the traditional subsistence way of life, towards more specialized production for profit (eg Branigan 1988). As well as supporting a whole new class of urban settlement, the wealth created by this economic success was also available in the countryside, for investment in luxury Roman-style homes which we know today as villas.

Critique

As with many innovative theories, the model which has developed from Haverfield's original outline went far beyond what could be supported by the available data. Hingley (1989, 1-2) has recently suggested that this model was in fact based more on Britain's recent experiences as a colonial power than on solid evidence. For example, in the Cotswolds the wealth of Roman period society was supposedly based on specialist wool production (eg Finberg 1959). However, an examination of the region's villas provides no positive evidence that they were engaged in this, or any other, cash-cropping activity (RCHM(E) 1976). There is certainly plenty of evidence for wealth, in the form of scores of known and suspected villa sites, including some of the richest in Britain. Chedworth villa for example, though not particularly large, was richly appointed, with a finely cut masonry facade, elaborate underfloor heating systems, and beautiful mosaics (Goodburn 1986). Yet there is very little evidence to indicate how this wealth was generated, in part because the investigation of the working elements of Chedworth and other rural settlements has been a neglected subject (Hingley 1989, 4). Even so, there is at present no reason to believe that the methods of production used at villa settlements were any more technologically advanced or profitable than those used on non-villa sites (Miles 1988, 66). Nevertheless, the view that villas embodied a more advanced social and economic system persists (eg Frere 1987, 257-8).

The argument that the planned cities of the Roman period implied the development of a new type of society (eg Frere 1987, 229) would appear to rest on more solid evidence. Certainly, larger numbers of people were freed from primary production than had ever before been the case in British society. Similarly, the growth of coin use on urban sites indicates increasingly vigorous economic activity beyond the constraints of social obligation (the embedded economy: Hodder 1979). However, the scale and significance of these changes has been distorted by the concerns of cultural elites, both Roman and modern. Tacitus' equation of the pre-Roman settlement pattern with ignorance and warfare - in contrast with the peace and productivity fostered by the Roman institution of the city (*Agricola* 21) - was hardly without cultural bias. Similarly, although Haverfield greatly advanced the study of Romano-British archaeology, he was both influenced by, and an influence upon, the urban planning movement of the early-twentieth century, with its emphasis on order and efficiency. Today, it is increasingly recognized that it is very dangerous to make assumptions regarding the social changes which might have accompanied the physical fabric of Roman urbanism in the provinces (eg Slofstra 1983). The building forms of Romano-British towns and villas, though termed 'Roman', were quite different from those of contemporary Italy, or even Gaul.

Zones of 'success' and 'failure' in the Romanization of Britain

The southern and eastern bias in the distribution of villas within Britain has led to the suggestion that the north and west were environmentally or socially unable to participate in a 'modern' villa economy. This view has been bolstered by the distribution of public towns, again occurring most frequently in the south and east of England. Groenman-van-Waateringe

(1980, 1041-2) has gone so far as to suggest that the capacity of regions to support these settlement forms was a prerequisite for successful incorporation into the empire.

The Severn-Cotswold region at first sight appears to have been a microcosm of Roman Britain as a whole. It is divided into two equal zones by the Cotswold scarp, running south-west to north-east, and the density of known villas falls off rapidly to the north-west (**Fig 1**). Of the region's two public towns, Corinium (Cirencester), the more south-easterly, was by far the most impressive, enclosing ninety-seven hectares compared with seventeen hectares at Glevum (Gloucester). But in this case it is difficult to argue that the contrast between the two Cotswold zones during the Roman period arose from differences in the level of sophistication of pre-Roman social organization. During the late Iron Age both regions had been part of Dobunni territory (on the basis of coin distributions: Cunliffe 1981, Fig 20), and while it is possible that tribal segments within the region developed significantly different levels of social complexity, this view cannot be supported by any positive evidence. Nor were there major inequalities in the natural resources of the two zones. The north-west zone's agricultural potential was probably broadly comparable to that of the south-east zone, while masonry, timber, and mineral resources were at least as plentiful, and in some cases more so. As the distribution of small towns, and rural temples and industry shows, the north west was quite capable of producing and mobilizing a significant agricultural surplus. This is discussed below.

Clearly the significance of villas and public towns within Romano-British society needs to be reconsidered. It should be pointed out that within the Cotswold region at least, there is no evidence that villas had clustered either along roads (Branigan 1977; Clarke 1993, Fig 5.11) or around major population centres. Hodder and Millett (1980) argue that social and political forces, rather than market potential, encouraged the location of villas around Britain's cantonal capitals and *colonia*. Bath was the centre of one of Britain's densest villa clusters, but many small towns with significant populations had very few villas nearby. Even the long-established link between major towns and villa clusters (Rivet 1955) may not be as simple as has usually been supposed. Corinium and Glevum were not far from large numbers of villas, but were not really central to their distribution. Rather, villas appear to have been densest in the area *between* the two cities, in the Cotswold Uplands (**Fig 1**). Possibly environmental or economic factors had some bearing on this distribution. Villa construction must have benefited from the abundance of stone suitable for masonry, and historically the region has been a great centre of sheep raising.

However, when the Dobunni tribal region is considered in its entirety it becomes clear that villa clusters can be interpreted as having been centred on pre-Roman central places. These comprised three oppida (Grim's Ditch, Minchinhampton, and Bagendon) in the centre and east of the region, with a high-status open settlement (Camerton) and possibly a nearby religious site (Bath) to the south (**Figs 1 & 2**).

It must be admitted at this point that the region's Iron Age central places are not well known. The high-status, but undefended, character of Camerton

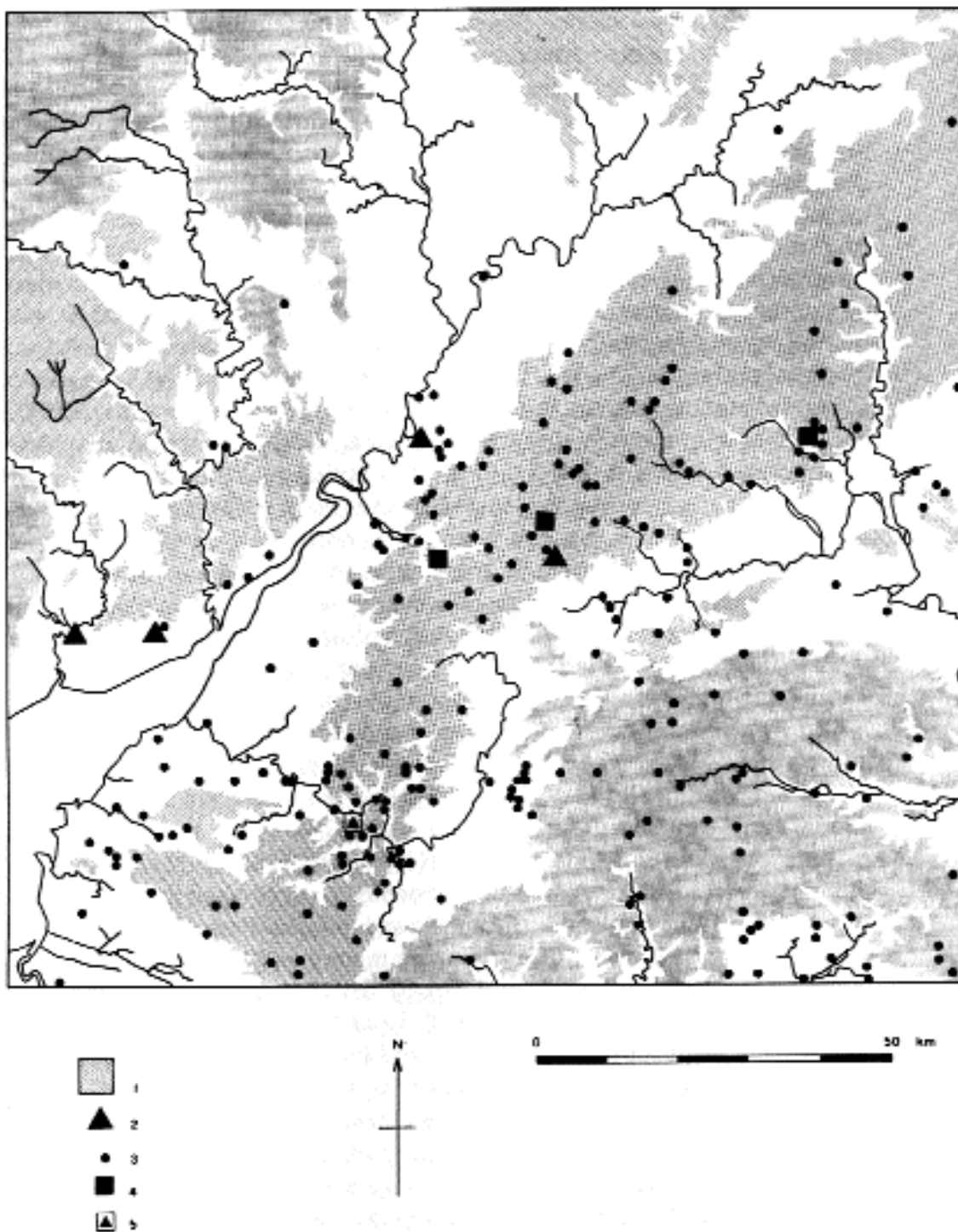


Figure 1 Villa Distribution. 1. Land over 100m above sea level. 2. City/Fortress. 3. Villas and probable villas. 4. Oppidum. 5. Roman small town Iron Age cult centre.

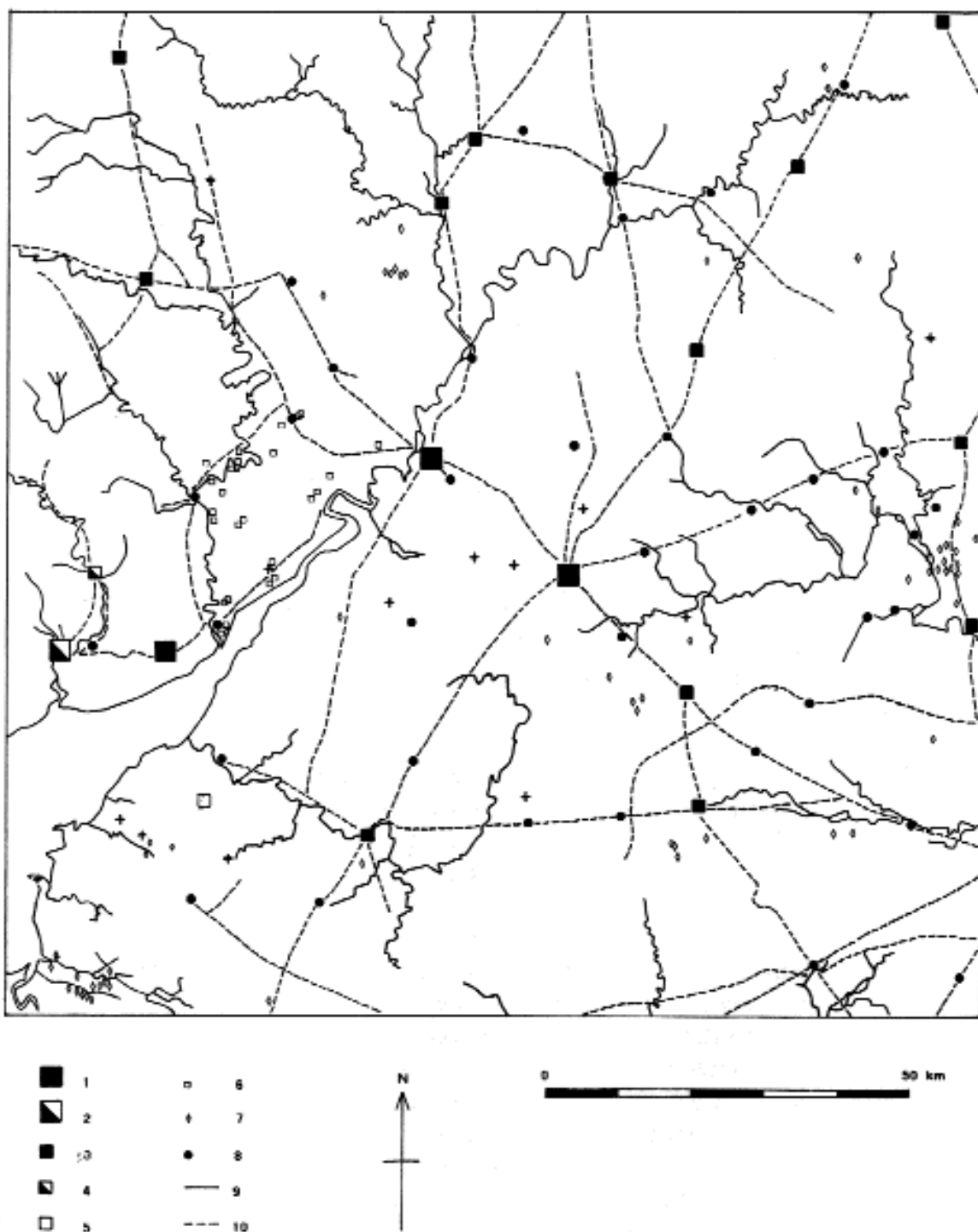


Figure 2 Roman period central places. 1. City. 2. Fortress. 3. Small walled town. 4. Fort. 5. Gatcombe villa/small town. 6. Iron working. 7. Pottery kilns. 8. Undefended small town. 9. Major rivers. 10. Roman roads.

(Cunliffe 1982, 61) leaves its role as a tribal focus uncertain. Bath's role as a pre-Conquest religious centre is even less clear, but has been postulated on the basis of the site's unusual thermal properties and its Roman-period association with the Celtic deity Sulis. However, any Iron Age structures which may have existed at Bath have been obliterated by the Romano-Celtic temple complex, and the small number of Iron Age coins may very well have been deposited during the early Roman period (Cunliffe and Davenport 1985). Even the interpretation of the oppida sites, which remain as standing earthworks, is problematic. Though widely accepted as an Iron Age oppida (eg Millett 1990, Table 2.4, Fig 6), Grim's Ditch is undated, and no centres of occupation have yet been identified. Minchinhampton's defensive features are also undated, and in addition of a rather unusual character. However, an elite settlement of some kind is suggested by the discovery of Claudian samian and Late Iron Age pottery, and by a high-status burial at the nearby site of Rodborough Common (Clifford 1964; Clarke 1982, 213). Bagendon, the most extensively examined of the three oppida, with its elite settlement at Ditches Hillfort (Clifford 1961; Trow 1982; Trow and James 1988), is now believed to be mainly Claudian in date.

Nevertheless these sites offer the best available insight into the territorial organization of the Dobunni during the Later Iron Age, and the connection between villas and Iron Age central places is supported by more than just the crude spatial relationship noted above. All the earliest villas so far noted in the region seem to have been associated with oppida. Woodchester is famous as the site of the largest mosaic pavement north of the Alps, dated to about AD 300. However, the villa was already palatial in scale and appointment in the late first century AD. Its location less than a kilometre from the probable oppidum at Minchinhampton, strongly suggests relocation by an indigenous elite family to a site more suited to a Romanized life style (Clarke 1982). Similarly the first-century villa at South Cerney was built within Ditches Hillfort, the principal elite centre within the Bagendon oppidum complex (Trow and James 1988). The only other known first-century villas within the Dobunni tribal region were all enclosed by Grim's Ditch. The implications of this are extraordinary. Even though villas did not reach their peak in numbers and splendour until around AD 300, they appear to have had a close association with the pre-Roman elite. In most cases there is no reason to believe that villas represented the rise of a new entrepreneurial class, or even that the basis of elite power had altered significantly since the late Iron Age. In other words, although they are one of the most expensive expressions of Roman culture, the presence of villas may imply only minimal change in terms of social organization.

Urbanism and economic systems

Though relatively modest by modern standards, it might be argued that settlements of the scale of Glevum and Corinium must represent a radical reorganization of society. However, it should be remembered that the inhabitants of cities constituted only a minute proportion of the population. The real impact of urbanism lies in the relationship between these settlements and their hinterland. Rather than create an arbitrary definition of urban settlements, based on size and density, I have chosen to consider all

settlements with a significant non-agricultural function, or which performed some sort of central place role. On this basis, the territorium of Glevum seems to have been highly successful economically, contrary to the impression suggested by the modest walled area of the city itself, and the sparsity of villas. It possessed major dispersed pottery and iron smelting industries, large rural temples such as Lydney, and more fully urban sites such as the 'small town' of Kenchester. The north-western part of the region was clearly capable of producing and mobilizing a significant agricultural surplus. The rarity of villas in this region seems to suggest not economic failure but simply a different pattern of wealth disposal.

A more quantitative approach to the relationship between settlements and their hinterlands is to consider the settlement system as a whole, using the Rank Size rule. Put simply, this states that in a normal settlement system the population of the second largest settlement in the system should be half the size of the largest. The population of the third largest should be one third the size, and so on. When both axes are plotted on log scale the normal distribution is a straight line with a gradient of one. Accurate population estimates for Romano-British cities do not exist, but based on towns' walled areas it can be seen that the province as a whole displays convex distribution (**Fig 3**). The exact causes of such a distribution are not agreed by geographers, but modern settlement systems with these characteristics tend to be poorly integrated, with low levels of trade, and often significant political divisions. The original thirteen colonies which formed the USA provide a good modern example (Johnson 1981, 160-4, Figs 7-9). From this we can infer that the cantonal units of Britannia represented separate socio-economic systems in practice as well as under the law.

It is also possible to compare the settlement systems in the hinterlands of Glevum and Corinium. This presents some problems, as the exact boundaries of the *colonia* and *civitas* territories are not known with any certainty. My own estimate of the territories has been based on Thiessen polygon analysis of the cantonal capitals, assuming that the Roman unit bore some relation to the preceding Iron Age tribal region. On this basis it seems probable that the Iron Age Dobunni tribe was partitioned in the Roman period between Glevum *colonia* and the Roman *civitas*, with the steep Cotswold Scarp forming the boundary between the two. Glevum's rank size chain seems to fit the rule well, whether the walled area or the total built up area of the settlements are considered (**Fig 5**). In the modern world this pattern is typical of a developed country and suggests that Glevum and its hinterland probably enjoyed a high level of social and economic integration. The picture for Corinium is rather different (**Fig 4**). Analysis of walled areas here suggests a highly primate rank size distribution (that is, Corinium's population was far larger than would be expected, or its nearest rivals far smaller). Plotting the total built-up area appears to create a more normal distribution, but this is in fact illusory. It should be remembered here that it is the relative populations of the settlements which are important, not their areas. The population density of extra-mural areas and unwalled settlements is known archaeologically to have been substantially lower, on average, than the population density of walled communities. Corinium, at ninety-seven

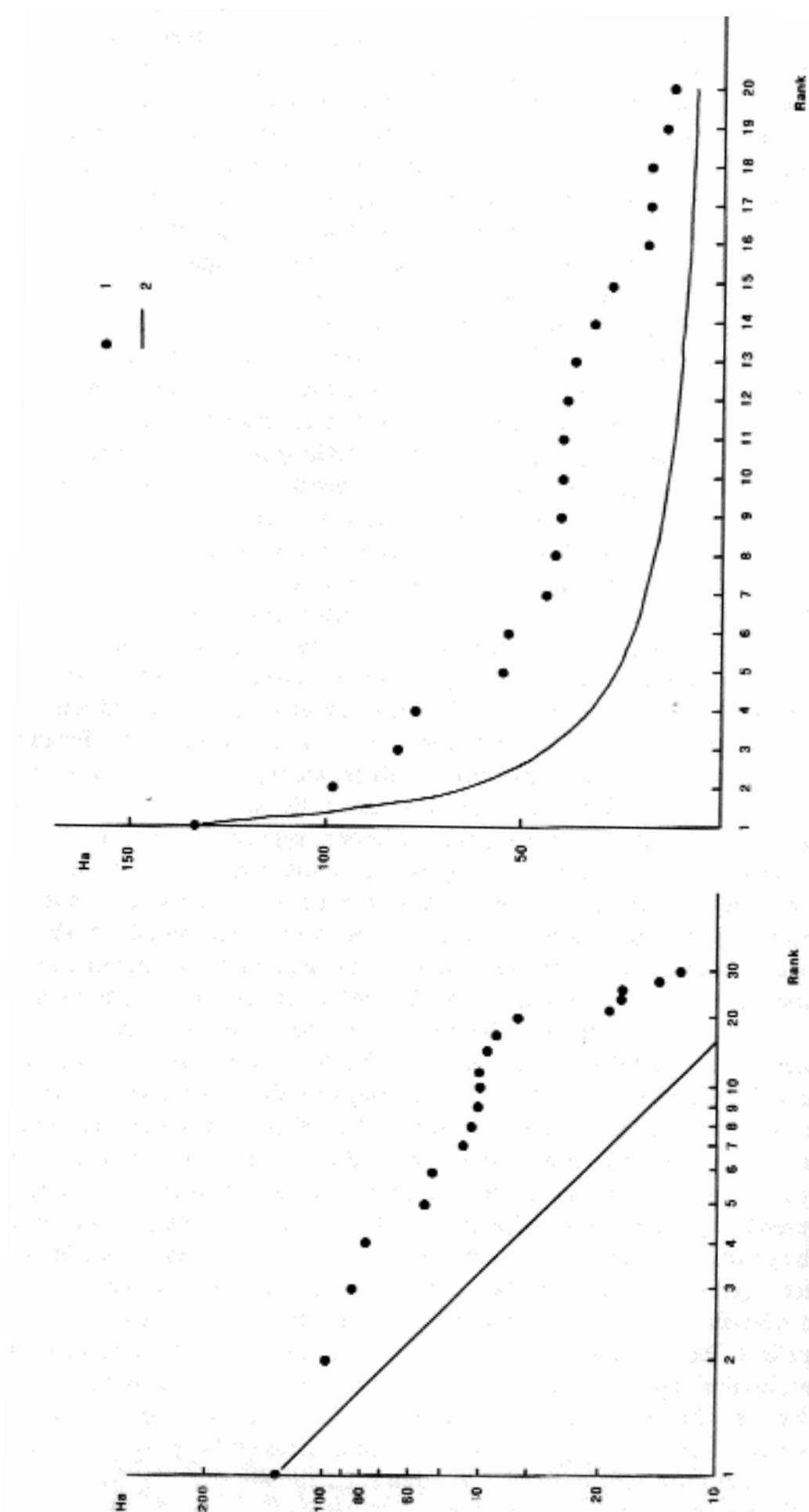


Figure 3 Rank-size distribution of walled towns, Britannia. 1. Walled town. 2. Expected theoretical value.

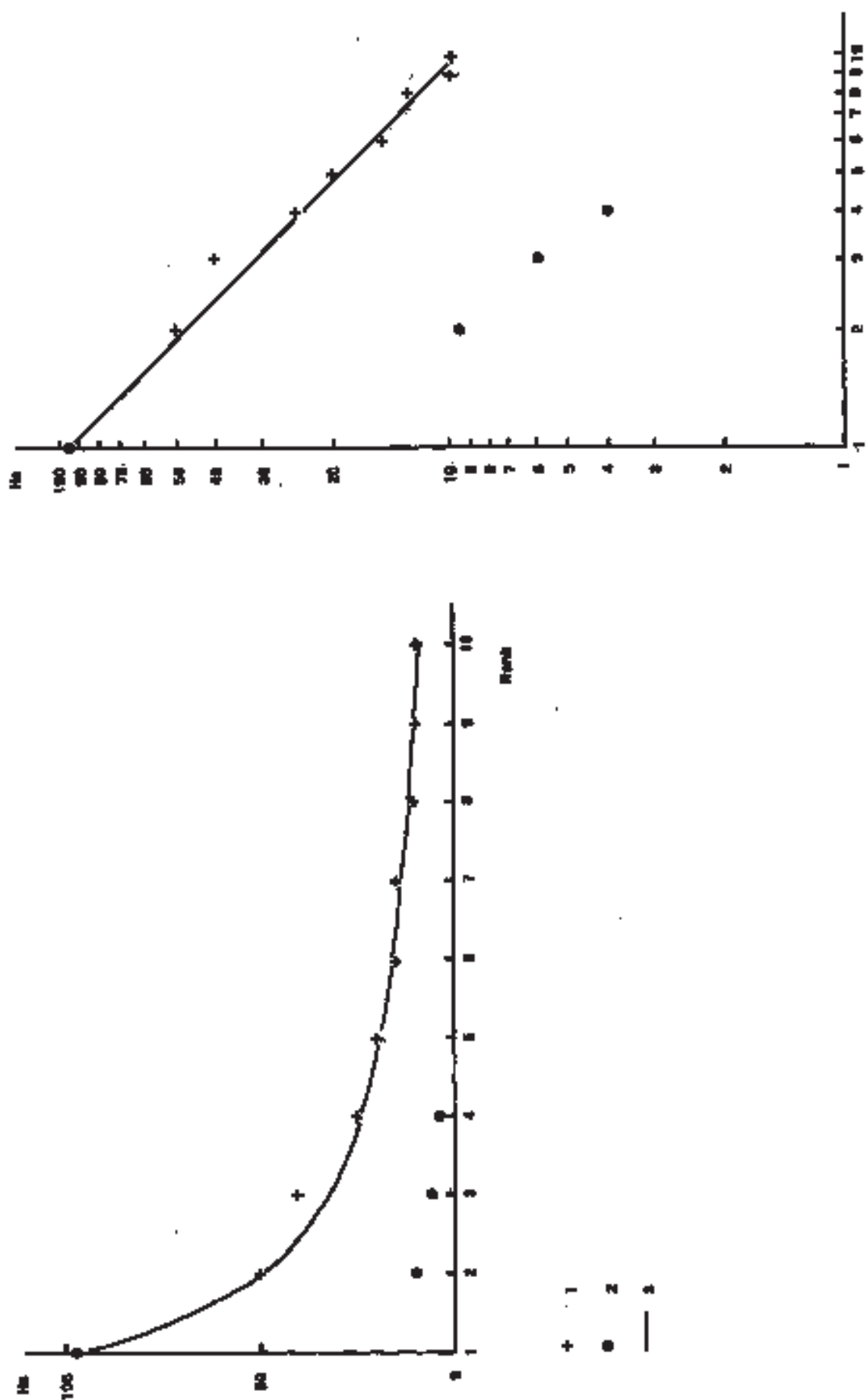


Figure 4 Rank-size distribution within Dobunni territory. 1. Total area occupied. 2. Walled town. 3. Expected theoretical value.

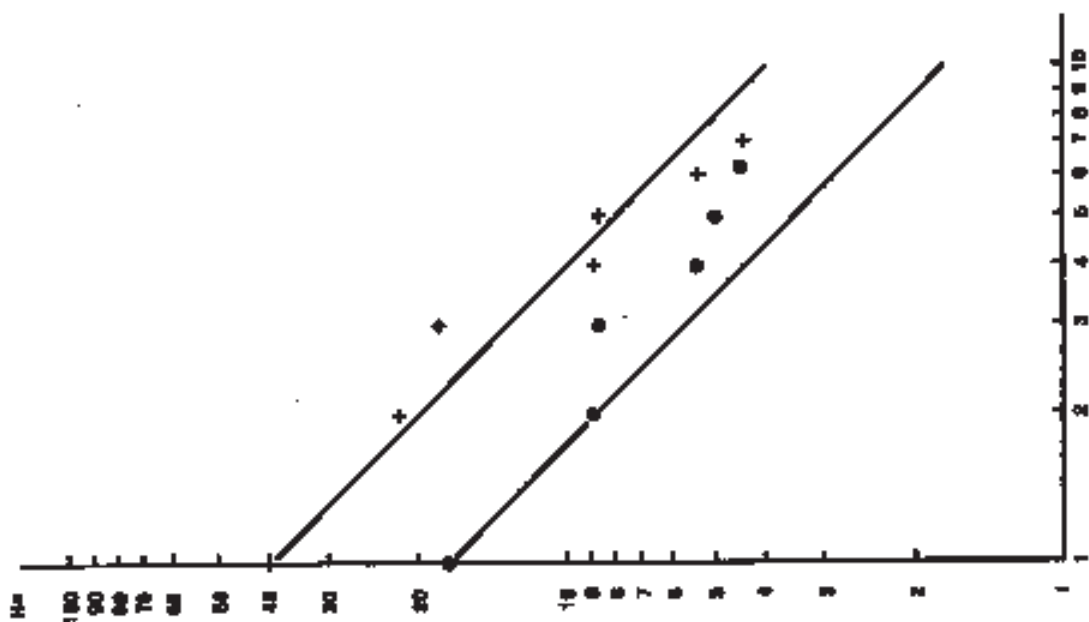
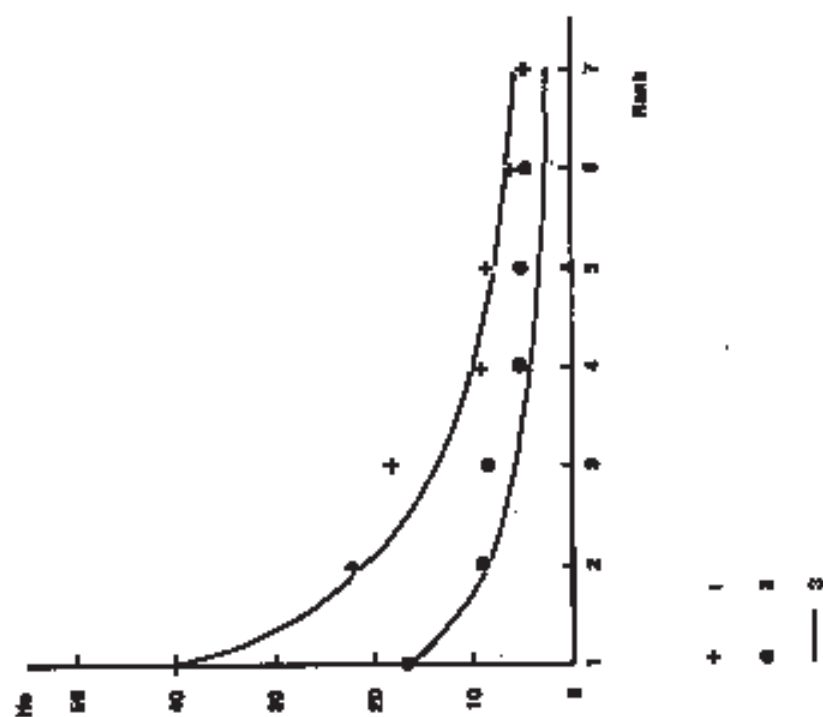


Figure 5 Rank-size distribution within the territory of Glevum. 1. Total area occupied. 2. Walled town. 3. Expected theoretical value.

hectares, must have had far more than twice the population of its nearest rival. In the modern world, this pattern is characteristic of poorly-developed systems, and is a common feature of less developed countries (Johnson 1981, 150).

To understand why Corinium was so much larger than the other settlements within its region, we need to take a quantitative look at the archaeological remains recovered from the city (for a full list of buildings, see Clarke 1993, 376-389). The archaeological evidence presently available for different building types within the Roman period settlement is plotted in **Fig 6**. Though the picture is far from complete, or without bias, it is immediately apparent that industrial activity was very limited. The only evidence directly attested by excavation comprises a building used for iron smelting (Leach and McWhirr 1982, 50-68), and a possible sculptor's yard (Wacher 1976, 65). In addition, the city is thought to have been the home of two mosaic schools operating in the late-third and early-fourth centuries (Smith 1984). These could have provided a livelihood for only a small number of specialists. Clearly, then, Corinium was not a major production centre. Nor, more surprisingly, does it appear to have functioned as a major centre for commercial exchange. Shops and a market building, adjacent to the Forum-Basilica in the town's centre, were consistent with the needs of Corinium's resident population. Given the absence of a major river (which would substantially have eased transport costs) it is hardly surprising that the city was not a major commercial centre. It is telling, however, that such a site should have been chosen as the tribal capital. Economic considerations would appear to have been of secondary importance from the outset.

How then can we account for Corinium's extraordinary size and wealth, the latter illustrated by the presence of some eighty known mosaics and tessellated pavements (McWhirr 1986, 245-259), often of very high quality? Corinium was almost certainly a consumer city (cf Finley 1975; Sjöberg 1960), with a huge unearned income derived from the monopolization of social and political power, and specifically from rents and taxes. As the Roman city was founded within a single generation of the conquest, only four kilometres from the Late Iron Age oppidum at Bagendon, it seems likely that this social and political power was organized along pre-Conquest lines (Jones 1987, 48-9; Millett 1990, 74).

Though containing a similar suite of public buildings to those at Corinium, Glevum seems to have experienced a different genesis. The site did not acquire urban status until late in the first century, and appears to have inherited much of the fabric of the preceding fortress and its attendant civilian settlement (Hurst 1989). The origin of the population itself was also different, including many more veterans and alien traders than was the case for the native elite-dominated *civitas* capital. This is reflected archaeologically in the greater prominence of industrial activity at Glevum, and the different character of its private buildings, few of which are paralleled in Cirencester's fine houses, or the villas of the Cotswolds (for a full discussion of building remains see Clarke 1993, 432-447; Hurst 1972, 1974, 1975). This difference seems to have been of the utmost importance both for the nature of Glevum's income, and for the manner in which the inhabitants of the city disposed of their surplus wealth.

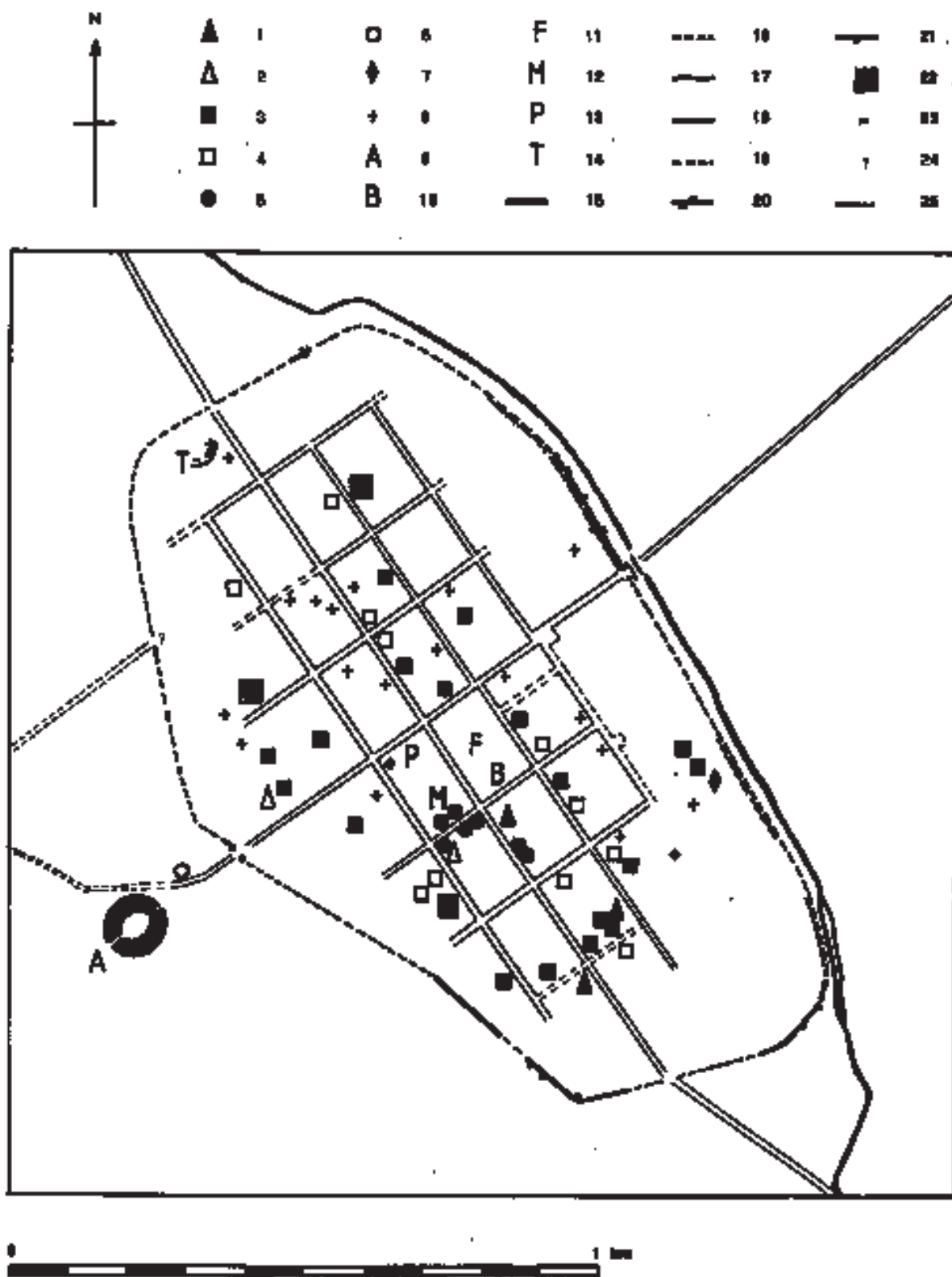


Figure 6 Roman Cirencester: the function of buildings. 1. Certain or probable temple site. 2. Possible temple site. 3. Wealthy house. 4. Modest house. 5. Strip building/shop. 6. Industrial premises. 7. Rural style working building. 8. Building of uncertain function. 9. Amphitheatre. 10. Basilica. 11. Forum. 12. Market. 13. Public baths. 14. Theatre. 15. Known street. 16. Possible street projections. 17. Water course. 18. Town wall. 19. Projected line of town wall. 20. Defensive tower. 21. Possible tower. 22. Courtyard house. 23. Stairs. 24. Possible gate. 25. Earthen bank.

Conclusion

Traditional models of Romanization anticipate a decline in the intensity of Rome's cultural impact as distance is increased from the core, Mediterranean region (eg Jones and Mattingly 1990, 151, Map 5.9). Clearly, this simplistic model is no longer adequate. It is necessary to ask why and how cultures affected each other rather than simply accepting that cultural change was the natural outcome of contact. Several writers have pointed out that societies are not monolithic and that different social elements (such as elite and non-elite) are capable of reacting quite differently to contact with an external culture (Galtung 1981; Bloemers 1991, 451-2). It can, I would argue now be shown that the outward ('Romanized') trappings of provincial society may not be as important an index to social change as was once thought. Corinium and its region were, following conventional wisdom, highly Romanized. However, this veneer of Classical civilization concealed the basic *continuity* of the ruling elite. In this instance, then, Roman style goods simply reinforced an existing social order.

In contrast, the adoption of Romanized material within Glevum colonia and the north-western part of the Cotswolds has often been interpreted as half-hearted. The city itself was far smaller than Corinium, and had fewer wealthy houses. The number of villas within its territorium was smaller, and their appointment more modest. In fact, however, social change within the territorium of Glevum may have been far more profound. The pre-Conquest tribal elite was partly or wholly replaced by military veterans and their descendants, and it seems likely that the city and its hinterland were far more socially and economically integrated than was the case for Corinium. While Corinium's power and wealth probably developed as a result of the continuation - and perhaps strengthening - of pre-Conquest patterns of exploitation, Glevum's prosperity is likely to have been rooted in an explosion of economic activity during the Roman period.

In short, close examination of the Severn-Cotswold region appears to stand traditional measures of the success or failure of Romanization on their head. Archaeology is by necessity the study of material culture, but we must not allow ourselves to forget that the real object of our attentions should be people. When we investigate post-Conquest social change, we should not place too great an emphasis on a narrow range of luxury items. As this paper has suggested, some groups clearly found ways of expressing success and status which was not dependent upon such items.

References

- Bloemers, JHF 1991 'Relations between Romans and Natives: Concepts of Comparative Studies', in Maxfield, VA and Dobson, MJ (eds) *Roman Frontier Studies 1990*, 451-454. Exeter.
- Branigan, K 1977 *The Roman Villa in South West Britain*. Bradford on Avon.
- Branigan, K 1988 'Specialisation in Villa Economics', in Branigan, K and Miles, D (eds) *The Economies of Romano British Villas*, 42-50. Sheffield.
- Clarke, G 1982 'The Roman Villa at Woodchester', *Britannia*, **14**, 197-228.
- Clarke, S 1993 *Settlement and Social Development: Settlement Archaeology in the Severn Cotswolds Region 750 BC to 750 AD*. (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Bradford).
- Clifford, EM 1961 *Bagendon: A Belgic Oppidum*. Cambridge.
- Clifford, EM 1964 'Early Iron Age Pottery from Rodborough Common and Duntisbourne

- Abbotts', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, **83**, 145-146.
- Cunliffe, B 1981 'Money and Society in Pre-Roman Britain', in Cunliffe, B (ed) *Coinage and Society in Britain and Gaul*, 29-39. (CBA Research Report 38) London.
- Cunliffe, B 1982 'Iron Age Settlement and Pottery', in Aston, M and Burrows, I (eds) *The Archaeology of Somerset*. Taunton.
- Cunliffe, B and Davenport, P 1985 *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath: Volume 1; The Site*.
- Finberg, HPR 1959 *Roman and Saxon Withington: A Study in Continuity*. Leicester.
- Finley, MI 1975 *The Ancient Economy*. London.
- Frere, SS 1987 *Britannia* (3rd edit.). London.
- Galtung, J 1981 'A Structural Theory of Imperialism. Ten Years Later', *Millennium*, **9**, 183-96.
- Goodburn, R 1986 *The Roman Villa, Chedworth*. National Trust.
- Groenman-Van-Waateringe, W 1980 'Urbanisation and the North West Frontier', in Hanson, W and Keppie, L (eds) *Roman Frontier Studies 1979*, 1037-44. British Archaeological Reports, International Series No. 71. Oxford.
- Haverfield, FJ 1912 *The Romanization of Britain* (2nd edit.). Oxford.
- Hingley, R 1989 *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain*. London.
- Hodder, I 1979 'Pre-Roman and Romano-British Tribal Economies', in Burnham, B and Johnson, H (eds) *Invasion and Response*. British Archaeological Reports, British Series No. 73. Oxford.
- Hodder, I and Millett, M 1980 'Romano-British Villas and Towns: A Systematic Analysis', *World Archaeology*, **12**, 69-76.
- Hurst, H 1972 'Excavations at Gloucester 1968-1971: First Interim Report'. *Antiquaries Journal*, **52**, 24-69.
- Hurst, H 1974 'Excavations at Gloucester 1971-1973: Second Interim Report'. *Antiquaries Journal*, **54**, 8-52.
- Hurst, H 1975 'Excavations at Gloucester: Third Interim Report: Kingsholm, 1966-75'. *Antiquaries Journal*, **55**, 267-294.
- Hurst, H 1989 'Gloucestershire', in Webster, G *Fortress into City*, 48-73. London.
- Johnson, GA 1981 'Monitoring Complex Societies Integration and Boundary Phenomena with Settlement Size Data', in van der Leeuw, SE (ed) *Archaeological Approaches to the Study of Complexity*, 144-88. Amsterdam.
- Jones, B and Mattingly, D 1990 *An Atlas of Roman Britain*. Oxford.
- Jones, RFJ 1987 'A False Start? The Roman Urbanism of Western Europe', *World Archaeology*, **19**, 47-57.
- Leach, R and McWhirr, AD 1982 'A Roadside Building', in McWhirr, A, Viner, L and Wells, C (eds) *Romano-British Cemeteries at Cirencester*, 50-54. (Cirencester Excavation Committee) Cirencester.
- McWhirr, A 1986 *Houses in Roman Cirencester*. (Cirencester Excavation Committee) Cirencester.
- Miles, D 1988 'Villas and Variety: Aspects of Economy and Society in the Upper Thames Landscape', in Branigan, K and Miles, D (eds) *The Economies of Romano-British Villas*, 60-72. Sheffield.
- Millett, M 1990 *The Romanization of Britain*. Cambridge.
- RCHM(E) 1976 *Iron Age and Romano-British Monuments in the Cotswolds*. (HMSO) London.
- Rivet, ALF 1955 'The Distribution of Villas in Britain', *Archaeological Newsletter*, **6**, 29-34.
- Sjoberg, G 1960 *The Preindustrial City*. New York.
- Slofstra, J 1983 'An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Romanization Processes', in Brandt, R and Slofstra, J (eds) *Roman and Native in the Low Countries*, 71-104. British Archaeological Reports, International Series No 184.
- Smith, D 1984 'Roman Mosaics in Britain: A Synthesis', in Campanati, F (ed) *Atti del III Colloquio Internazionale sul Mosaico Antico*, 375-80. Ravenna.
- Smith, JT 1978 'Villas as a Key to Social Structure', in Todd, M (ed) *Studies in the Romano-British Villa*, 149-86. Leicester.
- Trow, SD 1982 'The Bagendon Project 1981-2, A Brief Interim Report', *Glevensis*, **16**, 26-9.
- Trow, SD and James, S 1988 'North Cerney: an Example of Locational Conservationism in the Early Roman Cotswolds', in Branigan, K and Miles, D (eds) *The Economies of Romano-British Villas*, 83-87. Sheffield.
- Wacher, J 1976 *The Towns of Roman Britain*. London.