Detribalizing the later prehistoric past:
concepts of tribes in Iron Age and Roman studies

Introduction

The names and locations of Iron Age 'tribes' have provided a narrative of social organization in pre-and early-Roman Britain since the 16th century (Camden, 1586). With the development of archaeology in the 19th and 20th centuries, these names acted as a framework upon which the archaeological record could be hung (Rhys, 1884; Radford, 1954) and they continue to figure prominently (Cunliffe, 2005). Recently there has been widespread recognition of the complex processes that changed identities at the time of Rome's expansion (Cornell and Lomas, 1997; Mattingly, 2004). Despite this, the nature of tribes in Late Iron Age Britain remains relatively unproblematized, with the implications of 'tribe' names not regarded as significant in the transformations of the first century BC and first century AD. Instead, use of the term tends to be largely ignored, referred to without fully exploring its implications, or regarded as representing defined 'ethnic' or political entities. Some studies have recognized the problematic nature of this issue (e.g. Mattingly, 2006: 59) although frequently on a regional basis (Wigley, 2001; Moore and Reece, 2001; Hunter, 2007: 6-8), but whilst there has been some broader critique of European Iron Age archaeology's problematic approach to ethnicity (Jones, 1997: 29-39; Wells, 2001) the specific problems in defining 'tribes' in the Iron Age has rarely been addressed.

This paper examines why the term 'tribe' has retained such a prominent place in Iron Age and Roman studies, despite its widespread rejection by anthropologists (Fried, 1975; Beteille, 1998). It argues that traditional models of Iron Age societies are born from 19th century perceptions which effectively led to what Mamdani (2001) has called the 'tribalization' not only, as he suggests, of indigenous communities, but also of the later prehistoric past. The first half of this paper will explore the current use of the term 'tribe' and examine its historiographic origins in Iron Age and Roman studies. The second half explores the problems in using 'tribe' in the context of Late Iron Age archaeology, suggesting that neither archaeological evidence nor classical sources support many of its current manifestations.

It is not the aim of this paper to propose new models of Late Iron Age society but to question the use of 'tribe' in Iron Age and Roman studies. It does not dismiss historic use of the term, recognising their contemporary theoretical context; rather it argues that, despite examination of many other aspects of Iron Age society, 'tribe' as a concept remains ill-defined and uncritically used. Building on recent conceptualisations of *civitas* identities elsewhere in the Roman Empire (Roymans, 2004), it will be suggested that rather than dismiss the significance of the names in classical sources, they better reflect the emergence of new social and political entities at the end of the Iron Age, concepts that current use of the term has served to occlude.

Approaching tribes: past perspectives

Traditional models of Late Iron Age society in Britain visualize the existence of social entities termed 'tribes' (Fig. 1). These are regarded as hierarchical groups which exercised cultural and political hegemony over well-defined territories prior to the Roman conquest (Bintliff, 1984: 172). The names referred to in classical texts have been applied to Late Iron Age coin distributions, regarding these as tribal signifiers (Selwood, 1984). Particular Late Iron Age sites, often referred to as *oppida*, such as Camulodunum are regarded as centralized capitals of these nation-like entities (Cunliffe, 2005: 179). Where such *oppida* are harder to identify, for example in Scotland, other seemingly suitable sites, such as Traprain Law for the *Votadini*, have been used to take their place (e.g. ibid.: 217). This model argues that after the Roman conquest the Imperial administration adopted existing 'tribal' organization as its administrative framework, essentially fossilizing tribal boundaries and role of existing elites (Haverfield, 1924: 58; Millett, 1990: 65-67).

A number of studies have also suggested the antecedents of Late Iron Age tribes in the material culture distributions of the Middle Iron Age arguing for a process of state development from smaller cultural groups to tribal entities; most clearly expressed in Cunliffe's ethnogenesis model (Cunliffe, 2005: 592). A concept of tribal stability has been taken further with some suggesting tribal boundaries hardly fluctuated between 100 BC-AD 150 (Rudd, 2005: 148). Others argue these 'tribes' continued through the Roman interlude to emerge as early Medieval kingdoms (Yeates, 2008). The implication of these perspectives is one of ethnic and/or political hegemony in the Iron Age which was relatively unchanged by the upheavals of the Roman conquest.

The names and locations of these 'tribes' are based primarily on Ptolemy's *Geographia* (Fig. 2). Completed between c. AD 120-160, although seemingly referring to the later first century AD (Jones and Mattingly, 1990: 17), this work listed the names, approximate locations and major *poleis* of the 'provinces' of Britain. It has subsequently formed the foundation of interpretations of the socio-political geographies of early Roman and Late Iron Age Britain. Ptolemy's list has been allied to other sources, most notably Julius Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* (IV.24-36; V.6-25) and Tacitus' *Agricola* and *Annals*, which provide brief accounts of groups in parts of Britain. These form the basis for many localized debates on the meaning and geographic location of tribe names (e.g. Todd, 1973; Mann and Breeze, 1987). Save for occasional redefinitions of particular names, such as *Coritani* to *Corieltavi* (Tomlin, 1983; Breeze, 2002), and identification of some new 'tribes' (*Carvetii, Cornovii* and *Anavionenses*: Higham and Jones, 1985; Mattingly, 2006: 49; Hunter, 2007: 8), names and locations have broadly remained static (Figs. 1 and 3)

Whilst there have been reanalyses of Ptolemy's list, these have concentrated on its geographic reliability rather than addressing what these names represent in socio-political terms (e.g. Strang, 1997; Conquest, 2000; Parsons and Sims-Williams, 2000). This contrasts recognition that Ptolemy's *poleis* refers to a multitude of different site types, including Roman forts and towns, and places whose function is harder to define. Ptolemy was also highly selective, referring only to sites of perceived importance to Roman administrators (Jones and Mattingly, 1990: 18) and which were post-conquest 'Roman' centres rather than 'indigenous' pre-conquest settlements (Rivet and Smith, 1979: 116). Despite this, there is a continued association between these locations and the so-called *oppida*, as the capitals of these tribes (Cunliffe, 2005: 159), although it is clear that other significant sites are not mentioned (Jones and Mattingly, 1990: 18-19). The *poleis* of Ptolemy and *civitates* of Caesar and Tacitus have thus been translated as tribe (Radford, 1954: 1; Frere, 1961: 35), or even as 'tribal-states' (Aldhouse-Green, 2006).

The discussion of this issue has not been uniform. A debate on the implications of the term *civitas* has existed in examinations of Late Iron Age Gaul (Crumley, 1974; Nash, 1978), where they have been regarded as political entities, translatable as 'state' rather than 'tribe' (Nash, 1978: 473; Collis, 2007). Even here it is argued that *civitates* were "well-defined territorial entities" most of which have "a central site…that might be called a capital" (Fichtl, 2006: 42). There have also been attempts to challenge simplistic uses of classical sources to reconstruct past ethnicity, with a recognition of the complex ways in which identities were reconfigured in the Late Iron Age, often in response to the upheavals of Roman conquest (Mattingly, 1992). Wells (2001: 32) and Roymans (2004) have also seen Rome's expansion as creating new forms of social organisation through an interactive process, which Wells (ibid.) calls 'tribalization'. Others have used terms such as 'peoples' or 'kingdoms', in an attempt to avoid its ambiguousness (Mattingly, 2006: 59). Despite these approaches, 'tribe' continues to be widely used, but rarely defined. At the same time, the question of whether large polities, identifiable by names provided in classical sources, had any meaningful reality for most Iron Age communities has seldom been examined.

Tribal origins

Why then have scholars working on Iron Age and Roman Britain continued to use the term 'tribe'? This is not merely a direct reading of the classical texts. The Latin sources which refer to Britain refer to groups in Britain, such as the *Brigantes* (*Agricola* 17.2) or *Trinovantes* (*De Bello Gallico* V.20) primarily with the term *civitates*. Caesar uses this term alone, whilst Tacitus also uses *gens*, to describe the *Iceni* for example (*Annals* XII.31), and *nationibus* in general references to groups in Britain (*Agricola* 12.1; 22.1). Cassius Dio contains further ambiguity, never referring to the social make-up of the entities he identifies, merely providing their proper names. Defining the meaning of these terms, and their appropriate English translation is problematic. 'State' has been used in many translations (Mattingly, 1948; Hammond, 1996), in line with its classical meaning, although 'self governing city' might also be appropriate (Mann, 1960: 222). *Gens* meanwhile could be construed as 'clan' or 'peoples'. However, by the turn of the 20th century translations of *civitas* widely interpreted this not as 'state', but 'tribe' (e.g. Furneaux, 1906; Long, 1911; Holmes, 1914: xxxi) with *gens* similarly translated (e.g. Church and Brodribb, 1942; Mattingly, 1948: 73) It is unclear whether classical authors' distinguishing between *civitates, gens* and *nationes* reflects recognition of different social forms or mere inconsistency; Tacitus, for instance, used both *civitates* and *gens* to refer to groups which have since been viewed universally in translations as 'tribes'.

The place of tribes in terminologies of Late Iron Age society rests on long disciplinary roots. The correlation between *civitas* and 'tribe' emerged in the mid-19th century (Akerman, 1849, 178; Bradley, 1885: 381) with earlier translations regarding *civitas* not as 'tribe', but 'state' (Savile, 1591: 248; Aikin, 1774: 124) or 'city' (Golding, 1565: 107). Meanwhile *nationes* was translated as 'countries' (ibid.: 244) or 'kingdoms' (Camden, 1610; Barrington, 1768) and *gens* as 'peoples' (e.g. Savile, 1591: 244; Horsley, 1733: 363), reflecting contemporary social systems.

Only by the 19th century did 'tribe' emerge to describe indigenous peoples. Tribe derives from the Latin *tribus*, referring in its original Roman context to "an aggregation of families...with their chiefs" (Leaf, 1979: 148) a context of which 19th century writers were aware (Morgan, 1877: 277-341). As concepts of social evolution developed, the term took on connotations of primitiveness (Beteille, 1998: 187). Maine (1861) defined a 'tribe' as a group subject to a 'chieftain', which were: "homogenous entities" (Leaf, 1979: 148) whilst Morgan (1877: 102) defined tribes as synonymous with "language, government and territory". Morgan (1881: 4, 12) stressed that a *civitas* should be distinguished from 'tribe' in socio-evolutionary terms, arguing European nations had passed through a 'tribal' phase, preceding their incorporation in to the Roman Empire, meaning *civitas* was inappropriate for describing the social complexity of Iron Age societies.

Ethnographic surveys of the late 19th and 20th centuries marked an increasing interest in categorizing and mapping peoples as 'nations' or 'tribes', regarding peoples as racially bounded (Edney, 1997). As Europeans defined their own development in terms of inherent traits related to nationhood they saw societies as defined inalienably by 'tribal' identities (Jones, 1997: 64; e.g. Holmes, 1914: xlviii). Through 'tribalization', colonial powers and ethnographers defined indigenous communities as synonymous with supposed common attributes, including language, subsistence patterns and culture. The categorization of these groups rarely reflected the reality of identities or political boundaries, but rather their definition by colonial administrators (Fried, 1975).

It is difficult to disentangle relationships between contemporary ethnography and histories of the Late Iron Age. Maine and Morgan, whilst establishing models of socio-cultural evolution were also engaged in studies of Roman society and related experience from ethnography to studies of past societies (Maine, 1861: 264; Morgan, 1877: 12), having a direct influence on Holmes' reconstruction of the Gallic 'tribe' (Holmes, 1899: 12). Defining contemporary

tribes appears to have become part of a dialogue between understanding pre-Roman social organizations and colonial experience (Hingley, 2008: 321-325) with many alluding to the similarities between Iron Age societies and those in the colonies (e.g. Holmes 1914: xlii-li.; Haverfield, 1924: 23; Radford, 1954: 1). Holmes (1914: xlii), for example, in his translation of Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, drew parallels between British India and Late Iron Age Britain and Gaul to facilitate interpretation of the text. Many engaged in mapping 'tribes' in the colonies were classically educated and exposed to such analyses of the *De Bello Gallico*; Holmes himself argued it was essential reading for Britain's military and civil servants (Holmes, 1914: ix). Whatever the intricacies of this process, by the early 20th century the concept of Late Iron Age societies as tribal, as understood by some studies today, had largely been established (e.g. Rhys, 1884: 219-239; Holmes, 1907; Oman, 1910: 16-19). Whilst the complexity of colonial 'tribalization' should not be underestimated, this appears to have led to perceptions of tribes as coeval with social boundedness and cultural continuity.

The period's presentation as the stage setting for the Roman Empire ensured it was dominated by interpretation of the classical texts, rather than independent archaeological analysis (e.g. Akerman, 1849; Rhys, 1884; Oman, 1910); concepts of Late Iron Age social organisation resting on understanding classical sources. It is not clear to what extent translators of the sources were influenced by contemporary ethnography, but certainly by the early 20th century 'tribe' was a common term to describe a social (and racial) group of lesser complexity than a 'state', both in past and contemporary societies. From the late 19th century, 'tribe' appears more commonly in English translations of the classical texts (e.g. Cary, 1924; Mattingly, 1948). This also meant that, in some cases, tribe was inserted in to translations, even if the word *civitas* did not exist in the original. For example, in Cary's (1924) standard translation of *Historiae Romanae*, where Cassius Dio (LX, 20) discusses the *Bodunni* [sic] being subject to the *Catuvellauni*, the word 'tribe' to describe the nature of this group is inserted, but does not appear in the original Greek. "...he gained by capitulation a part of the Bodunni, who were ruled by a tribe of the Catuellani [sic]" (Cary, 1924: 417) (προσεποιήσατο ὁμολογίᾳ μέρος τι τῶν Βοδούνων, ὧν ἐπῆρχον Κατουελλανοὶ ὄντες: Dio LX, 20, 2 from version by Cary 1924)

Cary does this again in a section describing the capture of *Camulodunum* where he suggests "numerous tribes were won over" (Dio, LX, 21; Cary, 1924). However, in the Greek, Dio never identifies what these proper names refer to (cf. Dindorfii 1864):

καὶ παραλαβὼν σφας ἐκεῖνόν τε ἐπιδιέβη, καὶ τοῖς βαρβάροις πρὸς τὴν ἔφοδον αὐτοῦ συνεστραμμένοις ἐς χεῖρας ἐλθὼν μάχῃ τε ἐνίκησε καὶ τὸ Καμουλόδουνον τὸ τοῦ Κυνοβελλίνου βασίλειον εἷλε. κἀκ τούτου συχνοὺς τοὺς μὲν ὁμολογίᾳ τοὺς δὲ καὶ βίᾳ προσαγαγόμενος αὐτοκράτωρ πολλάκις ἐπωνομάσθη παρὰ τὰ πάτρια

It is also pertinent that Cassius Dio's description of *Camulodunum* can alternatively be translated as 'tribal capital' rather than the 'royal residence' provided by Cary (Rivet and Smith, 1979: 60). The latter offers a very different perspective on this place and its social implications, relating better to recent interpretations of the role of many *oppida* (Haselgrove, 2000). Cary's translation of these places as 'capitals' back projects the role of such double named *civitas* centres (e.g. *Corinium Dobunnorum*) in the province (Evans 1864: 137; Haverfield 1924: 60-61).

The same is true of other sources, with evidence that groups were not just labelled 'tribes' but that this reflected perceptions of them as particular social systems. For instance, Long (1911), in his translation of the Gallic Wars, describes Mandubracius as a "chief", despite Caesar (*De Bello Gallico* V.20) not describing him as anything other than "a young man" (adulescens) (cf. McDevitt and Bohn, 1869). Translators were reliant on contemporary social perspectives

and language as their guide, however, in using such terms, visions of Late Iron Age society were constructed as analogous to contemporary peoples, overlooking the complexity within the classical texts.

Cultural historical models

Concepts of tribes as territorially coherent meant that by the early 20th century the names in classical texts were related to material culture. As early as Camden (1610: cxiii) the discovery of 'British' coins was recognized as significant in reconstructing societies prior to the Roman conquest but it was only in the 19th century that associations between material culture and historically attested 'peoples' became established (Diaz-Andreu, 1996: 55). This was often in reference to 'races', but 'tribe' too became synonymous with culture and artefacts (Jones, 1997: 16). Other material was soon allied to the coin evidence, most notably ceramics which were regarded as good indicators of identity (e.g. Radford, 1954: 1). The clearest expression of this approach has been Cunliffe's (2005: 592) ceramic style zones, which he perceives as reflecting group identities which coalesced in to Late Iron Age tribes. Other elements, such as particular burial rites have also been argued as reflecting tribal identity, for example in East Yorkshire (Halkon, 1989) and south west Midlands (Yeates, 2008), whilst wheel-thrown ceramics have acquired the epithet 'Durotrigian' after the local tribe.

Defining these groups marked a desire by some to trace their names from prehistory to the historic past (e.g. Rhys, 1884), attempting to see continuity of 'peoples' (Jones, 1997: 2-3). Wigley (2001) illustrates, the similarity between Hawkes' (1959) cultural regions of the Early and Middle Iron Age and the supposed location of Late Iron Age tribes (compare Fig.1, 3 and Fig.4). Hawkes' regions were based on limited archaeological evidence and the similarity between the two is perhaps unsurprising; he himself suggested many "may be found forming cantonal or tribal areas under Roman rule" (ibid.: 174). Whilst Hawkes' does not define these tribes earlier than the first century AD, his implication is that these regions had a cultural homogeneity which continued throughout the Iron Age. Ironically, whilst contemporary visions of change were dominated by invasions and migrations, models of regional cultures stressed stability.

This model of cultural continuity has been reinforced by some approaches to the early Medieval period which see the Roman period as having fossilized earlier tribal groups (e.g. Dark, 1994). Yeates (2008), for example, argues for cultural stability from the *Dobunni* to early medieval kingdom of the *Hwicce*. Such concepts of continuity have been challenged elsewhere, Gillett and others (2002) arguing that similar early Medieval ethnogenic modelling in Germany relies on uncritical understanding of both texts and material culture. This seems part of a wider desire to imply cultural continuity for English regions, reflected in the way in which 'tribes' are often mapped to echo modern county boundaries (Saville, 1591: 248; Horsley, 1733: 363), marking perhaps a subconscious projection of contemporary geographies on to the Late Iron Age landscape.

Theoretical ambiguity

That concepts of Late Iron Age 'tribes' emerged in a colonial and cultural-historical context is unsurprising, more significant is its continued role in archaeological dialogues. In the early 20th century 'tribes' broadly reflected contemporary anthropological perceptions of preindustrial societies, but since that time anthropology's approach to 'tribes' has increasingly diverged from Iron Age and Roman archaeology. Concepts of segmentary societies emphasized greater complexity in 'tribal' systems (Kuper, 1988: 195-198), whilst later Service and Sahlins (1960) provided clearer definitions of tribal structures. Corresponding archaeological perspectives in America explicitly defined 'tribe' in socio-evolutionary terms (e.g. Gibson and Geselowitz, 1988: 21-22). In contrast, some continued to see Iron Age and

Roman *civitates* in essentially cultural historical terms (e.g. Cunliffe, 2005; Yeates 2008), rarely defining tribes anthropologically (although see Bintliff, 1984: 172).

Subsequently, anthropologists have emphasised the ambiguity of 'tribe' for defining social structures and ethnic groups, recognising their fluidity (Fried, 1968: 11; Fenton, 2003: 65). Paradoxically, as Pauketat (2007) has argued for use of the term 'chiefdom', the traditional tribal model has diverged from anthropological perspectives, retaining concepts which have since been widely critiqued. This reflects a tendency in European Iron Age studies to remain remarkably conservative in its social models (Hill, 2006) and the difficulties of incorporating textual evidence alongside critical anthropological appreciation of social structures. Although replacing 'tribe' with alternatives, such as 'peoples', goes some way to obviating the problem, these largely fail to address the underlying question, what exactly is being discussed: social structures, political networks or identities?

Problems of a tribal Late Iron Age

If the development of the term 'tribe' indicates it emerged within a colonial context which has remained under-theorised, how can we explore its relevance to understanding Late Iron Age societies? There are a number of issues to address in re-examining the traditional model. Firstly, what were classical authors doing when they named these groups; is 'tribe' appropriate for defining these entities? Secondly, how were identities and social structures reconfigured in the context of Roman colonialism and can other colonial encounters inform us of the complexity of such processes? Thirdly, do traditional models reflect the reality of Late Iron Age society visible in the archaeological and textual evidence or can alternative models be suggested? By exploring the process of naming groups and configuring identities in Roman and other colonial contexts, a more accurate understanding of the transforming nature of Late Iron Age societies may be established. Rather than rejecting the classical texts, the following discussion argues that they remain an invaluable insight into perceptions of Iron Age communities and the complexity of identities and power relations at the time of Roman conquest.

Classical perceptions of civitates

Regarding *civitates* as 'tribes' has primarily relied on envisioning these entities, at least implicitly, as ethnic groups; that they shared similar senses of identity which overlapped with political structures (Roymans, 2004: 3). This suffers from two significant problems: firstly, there is little to suggest that those naming these groups (classical authors, imperial administrations or the people themselves) conceived of identity in this way. Secondly, it is, as Jones (1997) and others (Bradley, 1997) have made clear, a simplistic reading of ethnicity.

The first problem lies in regarding Roman geography as reflective of Late Iron Age identities and social structures. Roman mapping represented an instrument of colonial power (Nicolet, 1991: 2); it did not necessarily seek to depict an objectified image of the political landscape (Isaac 2004). Neither was there in Roman geography a clear distinction between reality and myth in discussion of the social landscape, which could be manipulated to fit particular narratives rather than reflect ethnographic knowledge (Stewart, 1995: 7). Classical authors instead reflected political aspirations and achievements (Clarke, 2001: 102), communicating an impression of control, both to the conquered and the conquering. Strabo's perception of Ireland, for example, as barbaric reflected a mood that it was not worth conquering (Clarke, 1999: 327), whilst Ptolemy's contrasting description of it having the same arrangement of *poleis* to Britain (Fig. 2) implies a desire to present Ireland as similar, despite archaeological evidence suggesting they had distinctive social organizations in the first century AD (Armit,

2007). These visions are unlikely to mark changes in social organization, but shifts in political aspiration, now regarding Ireland as potential of incorporation in to the Empire.

Such texts also acted as rhetoric (Stewart, 1995: 10); the use of many names in Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, for example, a literary tool aimed at emphasizing extensive victory, with the reality of such groups less important (Riggsby, 2006: 120-125). This has significant implications for how we regard such entities; the identification of the *Segontiaci*, *Ancalities*, *Bibroci* and *Cassi* by Caesar (*De Bello Gallico* V.21), groups who had disappeared by Ptolemy's account, has perplexed scholars for some time (Evans, 1864: 131; Rivet, 1966: 101). Some have explained this as ethnogenesis during the Late Iron Age, whereby smaller groups were subsumed by larger ones (Rudd, 2005: 147). The nature of classical sources suggests, however, it is just as likely these groups were merely less worthy of mention by the second century AD because of their lack of political importance.

Civitas as tribe?

Fundamental to traditional tribal models is regarding them as bounded entities, relating territory to social group. 'Tribe' is, however, ambiguous in terms of whether it implies ethnicity, political structure, social organization or territory (Fried, 1968). Using 'tribe' may in fact fundamentally misinterpret the implications of the names referred to. There certainly appears to be confusion and inconsistency in the sources themselves over what they are describing, for example in the differences between Tacitus and Ptolemy regarding Caledonia as, respectively, people and place (Mann and Breeze, 1987: 90). For Rome too, concepts of identity were complex, with permeable distinctions between what now might be defined in 'ethnic' or 'political' terms (Lomas, 1997: 3-5).

Despite these problems there is widespread consensus amongst ancient historians that these texts are describing political entities, small 'kingdoms', rather than ethnic groups (Laurence, 2001: 68). *Civitates,* in classical terms, were political rather than cultural, reflecting Rome's focus on individuals and places, rather than categorizing 'peoples' (e.g. *De Bello Gallico* I.31; Braund, 1989: 140). Ptolemy's *poleis* reflect this, identifiable as 'places' rather than 'territories' (Laurence, 2001: 71). The desire to define geographic limits for groups that had little territorial coherence appears more a modern obsession than one of classical authors (Isaac, 1992: 406); these names are just as likely to refer to smaller communities or kin as larger ethnicities.

Naming tribes

Whether ethnic or political, a tenet of many concepts of tribes is that the names in classical sources are how Late Iron Age people identified themselves. Comparison with other colonial situations, however, indicates that the names given to groups were frequently part of a complex process of naming seldom reflecting indigenous identities or political structures. Re-examination of the colonial context in which concepts of 'tribe' emerged suggests social structures and expressions of identity differed markedly from western perspectives. 'Ethnic' attributions were intertwined with economic and political status, within and between communities, and did not reflect 'nationhood' as colonial perspectives conceived it (Worby, 1994). Instead, ethnicity was only one expression of multifaceted identities, which were socially contingent and varied in the intensity which they were expressed (Barth, 1969; Fenton, 2003: 114). Whilst the names used by colonial powers existed, what they referred to in society was very different or was expressed situationally. Processes of 'tribalization' led colonial powers to adopt indigenous names and apply them within their own framework of what constituted identity, ignoring their fluidity (Fried, 1975: 10). Communities could be defined as distinct 'tribes', despite the fact they lived in the same clans, worshipped the same gods, and shared the same practices (Uvin, 2002: 155). Frequently, mistranslations of local

terms as 'tribe' overlooked the complexity of social systems in a desire to apply overarching models, even when it became clear that 'tribes', at least in the imposed sense, did not exist (Mazuri and Shariff, 1994: 6-7).

Similar issues exist for 'tribes' in Britain, where the names often appear to represent outside imposition. The use of the name *Brigantes*, for example, translatable as 'upland people' (Rivet and Smith, 1979: 279) may generically refer to all northern groups (Higham and Jones, 1985: 9), or was similar to the use of *Tonga* in Africa (discussed below) as 'high ones' or 'overlords'. There is little to suggest, from the archaeological record, that communities within northern Britain, regarded as *Brigantian* territory, had any concept of unified identity. The definition of such groups may reflect other communities' perceptions, generic names attributed by Roman authorities, or the application of their status as a socio-political label. The 'doubling-up' of names in classical sources, such as *Cornovii* in Shropshire, Scotland and probably Cornwall, *Brigantes* in Ireland and Northern Britain, and *Parisii* in France and Yorkshire (Rivet and Smith, 1979: 279, 324-5, 436), suggests many names had generic meanings, not specific to particular peoples or places.

Nor, however, are labels merely ascribed by colonial authorities. Indigenous communities' labelling of other groups could also be institutionalized by colonial authorities. In Africa, for example, the tribal name *Tonga* derived from a name ascribed by other groups for all tributary communities (Worby, 1994: 375). By converting terms which referred originally to social status to represent tribe identities, colonial powers fossilized the status of particular groups. Elsewhere, names referred to geographic location or common habitats (Bates, 1995: 27). In North America tribal names were in fact those which were external to the peoples themselves or were essentially generic (Fried, 1968: 14). The names in classical sources may well incorporate similar problems, with the terms *civitates*, *gens* and *nationes* all derived from Rome's external perception of identities (cf. Lomas, 1997: 5; Carroll, 2002: 109), with no evidence people defined themselves in such terms *before* Roman conquest. Regarding the names in classical sources as reflections of pre-Roman identities is in danger of participating in a similar 'tribalization', imposing a modern sense of coherence ignoring the complexity of Iron Age identities. Similarly, it seems Roman administrators were attempting to impose a sense of order on to, and out of, a more fluid Iron Age social geography.

Identity in colonial contact

Some have also stressed continuity of identities and social structures from the Late Iron Age to early Roman period (Rudd, 2005). Studies of other colonial encounters suggest, however, that identities and social structures are usually far from stable; indigenous communities are rarely passive, manipulating and redefining their identities within new perceptions (Russell, 2001). Identities provided by external groups could be adopted but take on geographic and social contexts that were very different from previous meanings. Mapping identities after colonization reflects little of the pre-colonial situation; attempts to map tribal identities prior to colonial contact in North America, for example, are misleading as it becomes clear that identities were re-forged in advance of colonial encounters (Gosden, 2004: 87).

As Wells (2001: 113-4) and Mattingly (1992) have suggested for Rome's expansion, and Fried (1975) and Gosden (2004) argue more generally, the process of colonial contact could be instrumental in forming larger social entities with which to engage with the state. In other colonial encounters, when authorities defined certain identities as more acceptable, individuals manipulated their identities accordingly, even in the disruptive context of colonialism. In Africa, as languages, which previously had little ethnic affiliation, were ascribed ethnic associations, choosing to read in particular languages was to engage in ethnic self-attribution (Worby, 1994). In Rwanda, tribal definitions were established not by indigenous groups but by colonial definitions which were related to authorities' perceptions

of social status (Mamdani, 2001: 75). In such circumstances individuals were willing, and able, to manipulate their perceived 'tribal' identity in line with what was more acceptable (Uvin, 2002: 156). In Kenya, a range of groups adopted a single name to fit within the colonial administrative boundaries. This identity was constructed under a colonial regime, but the 'tribe' was created by the people themselves to allow existing groups to associate more directly with administrative agencies. This 'tribal' identity was not imposed, nor did it exist prior to conquest, but they adopted the traits of a 'tribe', despite their artificiality (Bates, 1995: 27).

Despite the complexities such examples provide of identities in colonial encounters, we rarely consider their implications for identities in Late Iron Age Britain, underestimating the extent to which people may have manipulated their identities. Creighton (2000) and Braund (1996) have indicated, the extent to which groups across the edges of the Empire were engaged in political interplay with the Imperial administration, with 'client kings' in particular capable of using Roman imagery in a complex manipulation of identity and power. Such studies indicate how some individuals were not passive in the processes of forging identities, manipulating classical imagery and expressions of status within their own context, most clearly through the use of imagery on coinage (Creighton 2000).

Roymans (2004: 221) has suggested something similar for Batavian identity: that *civitas* identity was forged from a combination of external and internal perceptions and ultimately appropriated by indigenous communities. Roymans' perception of the creation of Batavian identity reflects processes in the redefining and creating of North American slave identities. Colonialists regarded such groups as having their own characteristics; despite this group being a construct of external perceptions, this identity could be adopted by slaves, allowing them to adopt or reject the 'inherent' characteristics to their own advantage. In such encounters, all parties had agency in defining their identities, not just the authorities (Gosden, 2004: 141). Comparison with Rome's expansion elsewhere suggests many of the identities visible at this time formed as part of an interactive process with Rome's expansion. Bradley's (1997: 63) analysis of Umbrian identity suggests communities were organised at a relatively small scale until Rome's expansion, which acted as the catalyst for the creation of a concept of Umbrian identity. This is a well known phenomenon, of ethnicity emerging in response to external forces and, as in other colonial encounters, may result in identities and structures taking on the characteristics necessary for successful colonial integration or resistance. *Civitas* identity may have existed therefore, but the phenomenon was one forged in response to colonial encounter, only taking on territorial socio-political importance once within the Roman province.

This may explain one of the most significant problems in understanding 'tribal' identities: that our knowledge of these *civitates* derives from textual and epigraphic references which date from Roman times. Examination of sources referring to the *civitates* of southern Britain indicates that they predominantly date to the second and third centuries AD, and are derived from a limited range of locations. To some extent this reflects the limited number of inscriptions available, the late date of most literary sources and the likelihood that *civitas* identity will more often have been expressed outside one's region than within (Rivet and Smith, 1979: 227). These issues aside, it emphasises that identification of these names relies on sources from periods by which time their meaning is likely to have changed considerably; the extent to which such sources are relevant to identity prior to conquest is doubtful. What it meant for people to affirm their '*civitas*' identity in later centuries, for example *Catuvellauni* identity on the third century AD tombstone of Regina of Arbeia (Mattingly, 2004: 11), has little relevance to Late Iron Age identities. Instead, it reflects their changing role, with implications of status and origin acquired in the Roman province, emphasising too that identities within Roman provinces were far from static (Roymans, 2004: 254).

Whilst changes to identity in colonial encounters are historically contextual, a concept of stability in identity and power structures through colonial contact is difficult to sustain. Identity is defined and transformed in opposition to external forces, emerging in response to colonial contact or direct imposition by colonial powers, and this is likely to be the case in first century AD Britain. We must not confuse, therefore, identities as expressed in the Roman province with those situated in a pre-Roman context. The names provided by Ptolemy potentially provide a picture of entities forged in response to, and as part of, the colonial encounter, telling us little of the realities of identities or social organisation prior to contact.

Revisiting the archaeological and textual evidence

If the naming of such groups and defining them as 'tribes' is problematic what does the archaeological evidence suggest for the existence of traditional 'tribal' entities in the Late Iron Age? Crucial in this respect has been defining these groups as territorially coherent, whether as ethnic identities or political entities, on the evidence from Late Iron Age coinage (Leins, 2008: 102). These too can be read in an alternative light. The presence of coins which can be approximately associated with the location of some of Ptolemy's *poleis* has led many to argue these reflect cultural and political territories. Indeed, the boundaries of most pre- and post- conquest *civitates* are defined more on the distribution of Late Iron Age coinage than epigraphy.

Numismatists have sought to identify certain categories of coin, on the basis of iconography, and the inscription of named individuals and (more rarely) locations, as belonging to particular tribes, and on the basis of their distributions define the territorial limits of these groups (Selwood 1984). No coins have tribe names inscribed on them; the only potential exceptions are those inscribed ECEN, although whether this is a tribe (*Iceni*) or personal name, as seems more likely, is open to question (Mattingly, 2006: 81). The association between coinage and 'tribes' is not one which was immediately borne from the evidence; Evans (1864: 131) did not tie coins too closely to *civitates*, recognizing communities were unlikely to have been static in the first centuries BC and AD (Leins, 2008: 101). However, the association of coinage with the groups identified in classical sources was emphasised in a number of studies which attributed them to 'peoples' and 'territories' (Roach-Smith, 1845: 8), later regarded as 'tribal' identifiers (e.g. Akerman, 1849; Rhys, 1884: 18-35). This intensified through the 20th century with increasing complexity defining tribe locations and their dynastic histories (Allen, 1944; Van Arsdell, 1989). Recognising the limited evidence for associating coinage with 'tribe' names, some numismatists preferred more ambiguous labels (e.g.'western'). However, as Leins (2008: 110) notes, removing the names retains 'tribal sized' entities which need to be explained.

The nature of such tribe sized coinage groups is, however, also increasingly recognised as problematic. Distributions of Late Iron Age coinage as frequently depicted (e.g. Cunliffe, 2005: fig 8.2), represent the aggregation of coins in to tribal groups, but are made up of smaller distributions of different types (Leins, 2008: 103). Such distributions have been claimed as reflecting dynastic developments or *pagi*. However, recent surveys indicate that the distribution of types represent more complex distributions, sometimes overlapping, which do not represent a coherent entity but fragmented sets of social networks (ibid.: 107). Many have argued too that Late Iron Age coinage was used as part of fluid individual allegiances (Braund, 1996: 68; Creighton, 2000) and, as such, its distribution does not reflect tribal identity but an individual's power base (Mattingly, 2004: 13).

Leins' (2008) assessment of the coin evidence resonates better with the concepts of tribes noted above, as segmentary groups loosely related to each other, rather than territorially coherent and stable. Such analyses too support the recognition of the fluidity of identities, emphasising that attempting to map this through material culture is problematic. The

deposition practices of Late Iron Age coinage provides further problems, with large amounts occurring as stray finds or in ritual contexts (Haselgrove, 1986). In areas such as western Britain, 'Dobunnic' coinage occurs predominantly on post-conquest Roman sites (Moore, 2006: fig. 8.25), with few found in contexts dating before the conquest, ensuring that assessing their role and distribution in pre-Roman societies is highly problematic, let alone in mapping political or ethnic entities. In using the coin evidence to discuss pre-Roman social organisation we are in danger of projecting back the picture from the mid first century AD in to earlier centuries where it has little relevance.

Other archaeological evidence also indicates there is little to suggest there were large-scale social entities prior to the first century AD. Instead, sense of place, kin group, gender and status appear to have been more prevalent expressions of identity. Taking one region, that of the so-called *Dobunni,* for instance, indicates the limited evidence for social unity at the end of the Iron Age. Claims, for example, that burial rites in the region were an expression of local identity (Yeates, 2007: 66) are problematic; the evidence for western England rather than representing homogeneity indicates a range of practices including crouched and extended inhumation, excarnation and cremation, probably expressing a multiplicity of identities with little evidence for social cohesion (Moore, 2006: 124). The ceramic evidence too, used as evidence for cultural groupings in the centuries preceding the appearance of tribes in the first century BC/AD (Hurst, 2001) can be seen in a very different light, representing exchange networks which do not reflect tribal boundaries postulated from coinage. Such evidence can be better seen as marking communities which were situated within webs of relationships (Moore, 2007), articulated through exchange and land tenure, with segmentary or heterarchical social structures (Hill, 2006) and identity expressed at more local scales than 'ethnicity'.

The varied nature of the settlement record of Late Iron Age Britain also implies major differences in social organisation across southern Britain, with little evidence in most areas to suggest centralisation. Despite Caesar's claims of longevity to the socio-political groups he encountered, many of the attributes which are regarded as key to these *civitates*, such as *oppida*, had, in many parts of Europe, only recently emerged (Wells, 2001: 113). This is certainly true of southern Britain where so-called *oppida*, often regarded as Ptolemy's *poleis*, emerged between the mid first century BC and Roman conquest (Haselgrove, 2000). There is increasing evidence that the appearance of these locations was in direct response to Rome's expansion and the role of 'client' or 'friendly' kings installed over this period. Their appearance instead related to the development of new social structures which, on the basis of the coin evidence, constituted relatively small-scale political networks rather than communal identity. Whilst larger entities may have emerged in the later part of the first century AD, these appear to be new political entities in response to Roman interaction, but were neither tribal nor ethnic.

Segmentary societies in the classical sources?

It seems likely that classical geographers did not reflect the reality of social structures which existed in the decades before Roman conquest. Yet, there is some evidence within the sources that they too recognised complexity within the communities they encountered. Caesar frequently mentions smaller social units which operated independently and individuals who acted upon their own. For example, that the *Tigurini*, part of the *Helvetii* could migrate on their own (*De Bello Gallico* I.12) and that Kent was ruled by four different 'kings' (*De Bello Gallico* V.22). Similarly, various 'tribes' within the region defined as *Brigantian* (*Setantii*, *Tectoverdi* and *Lopocares*: Hartley and Fitts, 1988: 1), has been argued as evidence for confederacy, but perhaps represents smaller groups within broader senses of identity. Other sources also imply complex social networks between and within *civitates*. For example, Cassius Dio's reference (*Historiae Romanae* LX, 20, 1-2) that "part of the *Bodunni*

[Dobunni], who were subject to the *Catuvellauni*, made peace" indicates fragmentation. Cassius Dio's inclusion of "*part of*" and "*subject to*" implies the group were not a hegemony but could be fragmented and subservient to the will of individuals or small bands.

Such complexities in the sources are frequently referred to as representing *pagi* or *septs*, divisions of the larger *civitates.* There is little to suggest, however, that a universal social model existed across Britain and Gaul and this probably glosses over different social systems. It does indicate, however, that classical authors were partially aware of the fluidity of Iron Age *civitates* (Riggsby, 2006: 115). This evidence of fragmented and fluid social groups reflects evidence from the Iron Age coinage and references in classical sources to the role of largesse and military force used by individuals to maintain power within these groups (e.g. *De Bello Gallico* I.18). Alex Woolf (1998) has suggested something similar, drawing analogies between Late Iron Age social organisation and clans in early Medieval Ireland; these were not homogenized 'ethnic' entities but kin groups who regularly shifted allegiances. Such a model would be unsurprising given the nature of contemporary Roman political machinery which emphasized patronage and clientage rather than ethnic or cultural allegiance (Creighton, 2006: 21-22). This is perhaps a more convincing concept of Late Iron Age identities and power as "diverse, unstable, competing configurations….engaging in multiple regimes of power" (Jones, 1997: 8), rather than bounded identities with rigid political structures.

Civitas formation as ethnogenesis?

There seems little to imply longevity or regional coherence to identities or political structures prior to the appearance of the *civitates.* The question remains, however, as to the meaning of the names found in classical sources; why, and from where, did *civitas* names emerge? As Rudd (2005: 148), asks: "why was *Corinium Dobunnorum* named this, if not because the people around were called the *Dobunni?*". Reanalysis of the evidence suggests the question should not be whether or not these people called themselves *Dobunni*, but who exactly called themselves *Dobunni*, and why and when did they? Identities and socio-political structures are clearly likely to have been in a state of flux, with identities reconfigured to align with new social structures. It also seems clear that the names which survive represent a fragmentary, politically manipulated set, potentially representing relatively small, or politically important, groups.

Evidence from those *oppida* which later became *civitas* centres, indicates an increasing focus on creating monuments to display power and influence. Creighton (2006) argues some, such as the impressive burial at Folly Lane, Verulamium, represent statements of kingship which became references to a mythical past in the developing town, legitimising power in the early Roman province. Similar roles can be argued for other elements, such as the construction of villas within earlier enclosures, emphasising a sense of continuity of power in the immediate post-conquest period, for example at the Ditches, part of Bagendon (Trow et al., 2009), Gorhambury at Verulamium and Fishbourne near Chichester (Creighton, 2006: 54-59). There is little evidence to suggest at either site that there was longevity of elite occupation (Haselgrove and Millett, 1997; Moore, 2007). Indeed they often appear to have emerged in previously relatively sparsely populated areas, potentially representing the development of new locales for maintaining power, rather than continuity from earlier power structures (Hill, 2007). The trappings and expression of regional power, therefore, were expressed only in the decades immediately before, and after, the Roman conquest.

Others have seen this process as ethnogenesis (Roymans, 2004), the formation of larger social entities in response to expanding Roman power. In Britain, this appears to be a relatively short process – regional power bases only existing for a few decades before conquest but many being later appropriated as *civitas* centres. At the time of conquest, stressing a sense of social cohesion was potentially in the interests of both newly established elites and the Roman

administration. Rome may have been complicit in redefining what '*civitas*' affiliations constituted; the meaning of being *Catuvellauni* was itself in a state of flux. Evidence from classical sources indicates that administration of Gaul and Britain was created through political patronage, as much as relating to previous social groups, and it would have been expedient to foster senses of regional cultural and political unity (G. Woolf, 1998: 36) The use of such alliances does not necessarily imply that those who engaged with the new regimes, before and after conquest, were necessarily those who were in charge of nation like entities beforehand. Indeed, it is possible that it was those who did not have access to power who may have regarded this new route by which to acquire prestige as most enticing (Moore, 2007: 56). It is worth noting that such kings were temporary, eventually replaced and their territories incorporated in to the Empire (Braund, 1996).

Both local elites and Roman administrators would have been complicit in creating a myth of regional suzerainty. As Dio's statement of part of the *Dobunni's* surrender to Rome suggests, it was potentially important for communities after the conquest to express their '*Dobunniness*'; if the *Dobunni* are perceived as a group willing to 'deal' with the Empire, who defines themselves as *Dobunni*? Considering the turbulence of power structures in the first century AD such groups may have been one amongst many vying for power; as in colonial encounters elsewhere, how many other communities and identities disappeared in such processes, wiped from Ptolemy's map by the hegemony of the Roman *civitates*? The story no doubt was a long and fluid one; Roymans' (2004: 254) analysis of the Batavians indicates *civitas* identity developed in the first century AD, but by the third century AD was beginning to decline in importance, with the epigraphic evidence from Britain implying a similar story. Far from stretching back in to the Iron Age and remaining stable in to the post-Roman period, the *civitas* was a relatively short lived political entity.

Conclusions

The power of words is crucial in colonial discourse (Fried, 1975: 114) and this paper has sought to subject the term 'tribe' in Iron Age studies to similar scrutiny to that which it has received in anthropology. It has suggested that use of the term developed out of 19th century attitudes towards indigenous identities and social structures, driven by contemporary colonial encounters. The problem is not so much in using 'tribe', but in not defining its implications for social reconstruction. Current models are in danger of downplaying the complex changes in identities and political structures which took place in the first century BC and AD and how *civitas* identity changed in succeeding centuries. To continue using the term risks projecting back the role of political institutions in to earlier centuries where there is little evidence for them. Without critically reflecting on the enduring influence of 19th century visions we are in danger of perpetuating colonial concepts of ethnicity and social structures which obscure the potentially multifaceted and fluid nature of identities in the Iron Age-Roman transition. Avoiding discussion of the applicability of 'tribe', or its association with *civitas*, marks part of a broader unwillingness to define Iron Age social systems. Re-examination of the term, allows for more rigorous discussion of the nature of these entities and de-coupling of 'tribes' from our narratives. The literary and archaeological evidence suggests that *civitates* did not fossilize the ethnicities of hundreds of years but the success of particular groups; it is their names which we have been written on to the early Roman landscape.

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Figure List/Captions (not included in this version)

1: Map of 'tribes' (after Cunliffe 2005, 179, copyright Barry Cunliffe, with permission)
2: Ptolemy's map of Britain and Ireland (from Jones and Mattingly 1990, map 2:4, copyright of David Mattingly, with permission)
3: Camden's map of Britannia (reproduced from Camden 1610, copyright Society of Antiquaries of London, with permission)
4: Hawkes' provinces and regions (after Hawkes 1959, fig 1, copyright Antiquity, with permission).