Brexit, Boundaries, and Imperial Identities: a comparative view
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Biographical note
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Abstract
2016 will be marked as a year in which identity politics reached new levels of significance. Among numerous dramatic events, the UK referendum on membership of the European Union has brought many issues of interest to archaeologists to the fore. These range from entirely contemporary concerns such as the future of research funding in Britain to topics of more longitudinal significance, including the interactions between different identity groups in particular economic and political circumstances. In this paper, I wish to explore aspects of the distinctive position of Britain as an illustration of identity dynamics in the long-term, focussing on the relationship between imperialism and identities, and viewed through the lens of recent work in Border Studies. Brexit can be seen as the culmination of the collapse of the British empire, and British identity, in the post-WWII era and the particular dynamics of this process invite comparison with Britain's earlier position as one of the frontier provinces of the Roman empire, especially in the 4th and 5th centuries AD. This comparison reveals two paradoxical dimensions of imperial identities, the first being that so-called 'peripheries' can be more important than 'cores' in the creation of imperial identities, and the second that such identities can be simultaneously ideologically powerful yet practically fragile in the circumstances which follow imperial collapse. Such insights are important because, at a time of apparently resurgent nationalism in many countries, archaeologists need to work harder than ever to understand identity dynamics with the benefit of time-depth.

Introduction: archaeology and identity in the new age of populism

The extraordinary events surrounding the UK's referendum on European Union membership in late June, 2016, seem to be part of a series of current political stories in which status quo situations are being challenged, conventions of public discourse broken, and ideas of progress in global integration overturned. Hindsight will judge how significant these events really are, but they also demand an immediate response from the academic community, both as scholars and as citizens, and from archaeologists as much as anyone else. This is because some of the trends appearing to manifest themselves in these events directly concern the relationships between identity groupings and ideas of shared or divergent pasts (and futures) that archaeologists have been interested in for some time. The lessons of many such studies, moreover, highlight how in previous moments of prominent nationalist and populist political discourse, archaeologists have sometimes become directly embroiled, if not actively culpable, in buttressing some of the spurious claims to historical legitimacy of such movements (Arnold 1990; Díaz-Andreu 2007; Meskell 2002). This time we can be better prepared (cf. e.g. Gustafsson and Karlsson 2011). Many analyses of the circumstances leading up to the 'Brexit' vote, its implications, and the similarities it bears to events such as the US election result, will be written across many media in the coming months and years. This paper is intended to contribute one long-term view to understanding some aspects of the referendum result and highlighting comparisons between this situation and earlier historical contexts. Specifically, my aim is to explore the dynamics of identities in imperial situations, and I will argue that there are instructive comparisons between the processes underway in the later and post-Roman empire, in the 4th and 5th centuries AD, and the fate of the British empire in the 20th, the latter context being crucial to the 'Brexit' story. This comparative exercise yields insights into the relationships between frontiers, empires and identities which will hopefully be of value in understanding both past situations of this sort and some of the present political crises; it will also highlight some of the distinctive dynamics of 'Brexit' compared to other manifestations of contemporary populism. To be clear, while I voted for Britain to remain in the EU in the referendum and have strong opinions about its outcome, the objective of this paper is less to be politically activist in the sense advocated by Tilley (1989) or McGuire (2008) – valid though that standpoint is – or to be judgemental of those with different views, and more to seek understanding of why this event has happened and glean some critical insight from it. Some further thoughts on the relationship between the personal, the political and the scholarly are offered in the conclusion.

Before delving into the imperial context of Brexit and its possible comparative value, a little background to the events (so far) is necessary. A commitment to hold an 'in/out' referendum on UK membership of the European Union was made in the Conservative party manifesto for the May 2015 general election. When that election resulted in a surprise Conservative majority in the House of Commons, the road to a referendum was taken fairly swiftly, with the legislation to establish the terms of the plebiscite drafted and passed by parliament by 17th December 2015, at the same time as Prime Minister David Cameron and others pursued a campaign of international diplomacy in an attempt to secure more preferable terms of British membership. When this concluded in February 2016 the referendum date was fixed and campaigning began in earnest, though the official campaign period only began on 15th April, and the vote took place on 23rd June (BBC 2016a; Electoral Commission 2016; Parliament 2015). Approximately 33.5 million people voted, 72% of the eligible electorate. 52% voted to leave the EU and 48% to remain, a difference of nearly 1.3 million votes (BBC 2016b). The result took many politicians and commentators by surprise and in its aftermath there have been dramatic party political changes including the appointment of a new Prime Minister, and widespread disagreements about the meaning of the result and its various impacts, though these certainly include a rise in reported hate-crimes against immigrants (by

41%, comparing July 2016 to July 2015; BBC 2016c), and not just those of EU origin who had been targeted by some elements in the 'leave' campaign. A range of petitions, social media groupings and other responses have appeared to represent 'remain' voters, including a new newspaper (*The New European*), while an equally wide range of approaches to negotiating Brexit have appeared among the 'leave' camp.

This is not the place to go into all of these still-developing aspects of the referendum result. More pertinent are a couple of themes which provide the immediate context for the vote. One of these is of course the trajectory of Euroscepticism in British politics that goes back to the UK's troubled early relationship with the forerunner to the EU, the EEC (European Economic Community), which Britain initially declined to participate in at its foundation in 1957, then was excluded from through the 1960s, but finally joined in 1973, with a referendum in 1975 to ratify that decision (Wilson 2014). Sections of both the Labour and Conservative parties have remained ambivalent or hostile to European integration ever since, while explicitly anti-EU parties – particularly the Referendum Party and its successor UKIP (UK Independence Party) – have steadily grown since the mid-1990s, initially in response to the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 which formalised the transition from the EEC to the EU, and then to currency union which took place across much of Europe from 1999 (BBC 2015). Such sentiments have also been dominant in significant sections of the print news media over the same period (see e.g. Barnett 2016; Martinson 2016). A second important theme is the political geography of the UK, which has not remained static in recent decades. Devolution of powers from the London-based UK government to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – the latter in the context of the peace agreement to end the 'Troubles' – have been a significant development since the late 1990s, with Scotland perhaps most prominently following this pathway to the point of having a referendum on full independence in 2014; this resulted in a vote for continued union by 55% to 45% (BBC 2014a; cf. Colley 2007). These changes have in turn led to a focus on the question of English identity, in legislative, cultural and academic contexts (BBC 2013; BBC 2016d; Preston 2004). These centrifugal trends in the 'United' Kingdom appear to have been reinforced in the vote on 23rd June, and this is a key theme that many commentators have focussed on (along with generational, educational, and economic divides), with Scotland, Northern Ireland, and London (plus its commuter belt and some other big cities) trending 'remain', and much of England and Wales voting 'leave' (BBC 2016e; Taylor 2016; cf. Flip Chart Fairy Tales 2016). Taken together, these issues to do with the equivocal international outlook of Britain since the Second World War, and the balance of British vs. other national identities within the UK, provide crucial context for understanding the referendum result. They also offer inroads to explore further back in time in search of a deeper understanding, particularly in relation to the dynamics of empire and what comes after, for both have a post-colonial dimension, as will be explored further below.

This point does, though, prompt the questions, what does all of this have to do with archaeology, and what can archaeologists meaningfully contribute to the debates these events have opened up? Clearly there are very practical intersections with the future fortunes of archaeologists, in whatever context they work, in relation to funding for university research, or other economic impacts upon the construction industry, for example. There are also ideological consequences for the direction of travel of the whole of UK academia, which may in turn impact on staff and student recruitment, ease of working internationally and so on (see e.g. Gill 2016). Two intersections stand out, though, between these events and our discipline. The first is the role of received ideas about the past in influencing people's feelings about their identity in the present, and thus their political decisions. This is a well-researched area which has furnished us with numerous case-studies of the archaeological contribution to national, colonial, post-colonial and other cultural identities in modern times and across the

globe (e.g. Atkinson et al. (eds) 1996; Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2012; Gosden 2012; Hingley 2015; Kohl and Fawcett (eds) 1995; Meskell (ed.) 1998; 2002; Trigger 1984). Such studies have highlighted both the frequent political manipulation of interpretations of the past, as well as some of the positive effects of using heritage in community-building and progressive political activism. It seems clear that, if Britain and indeed Europe and the US are facing a resurgence of nationalist political trends, we need to be highly alert to this unfolding situation and apply the lessons learned from this work accordingly, particularly through developing prompt critical responses (cf. Green (ed.) 2016; Gustafsson and Karlsson 2011; Williams 2016). The second area of intersection lies in the broader role of archaeology to use its long-term, comparative perspective – without sacrificing depth of understanding of particular cultures – to inform wider discussion of social theoretical concepts which are at play in these current events. In this case, the specific domain of identity – how it works as a process, how identity-concepts vary across time and space, and how people become mobilised by particular identities – is obviously crucial. Archaeological discussion of identity is of course very well-established (e.g. Díaz-Andreu et al. (eds) 2005; Gardner 2007; Hales and Hodos (eds) 2010; Jones 1997; Meskell 1999; 2001; Shennan (ed.) 1989), and has perhaps recently entered a more critical phase where the utility of the concept has been questioned from different standpoints (e.g. Casella and Fowler 2005; Pitts 2007; cf. Harris 2016). It is my contention in this paper that recent events highlight the value of much of the archaeological discussion of identity in the 1990s and early 2000s, and that there is considerable pragmatic benefit to be gained from continuing to pursue some of the ideas developed during that period. I will expand upon this theoretical component of my argument in the central part of this paper, in the context of recent work in the field of 'Border Studies', but before reaching that point a discussion of 'British' identities will help lay the groundwork, by illustrating some of the key processes.

'Britishness' and Brexit: the long view
In seeking to analyse the formation and dissolution of imperial identities as part of the context of Brexit, a critical history of 'Britishness' is essential, though of course it can only be dealt with in broad-brush terms in this paper. This history essentially begins with the Romans. Even though much would be made in later centuries of the 'Celtic' identities of the pre-Roman inhabitants of Britain and Ireland, there is little evidence that people in these areas at the time of contact with Rome adhered to any such broad cultural grouping (Collis 2003; James 1999). It rather seems to be the case that, as in other imperial and colonial situations elsewhere in the world at different times, loose 'tribal' groupings crystallized as part of the contact process and then became more fixed in those areas that came under Roman rule, encompassing what is now England and Wales (e.g. Creighton 2000; Hill 2007; Moore 2011; cf. e.g. Derks and Roymans 2009; Ferguson and Whitehead (eds) 2000; Gardner et al. (eds) 2013). Above this scale of identity sat 'Britishness', similarly an artefact of the imperial process, and like some of the regional identities apparently becoming internalized over time (Matthews 1999; cf. Jenkins 2000; 2014 on the identity processes underlying this, based especially on Goffman 1990 [1959]). 'Native' people within the Roman province(s) of Britain might therefore have identified as Britons, Romans (if they were citizens, as most were by the 3rd century AD) and/or members of a regional grouping, such as one of the later Roman provinces or more likely the smaller administrative units, the *civitates* in the Roman system, such as the Catuvellauni or the Silures (Dark 1994; White 2007). Those outside the Roman-controlled territory, in what became Scotland and Ireland, would have had less direct experience of colonially-administered identities, but there are also signs of more cohesive groupings forming over time, such as the Picts in the north (Hunter 2007). While we might also expect resistant or discrepant identities within the Roman provinces (cf. Given 2004;

Mattingly 2004; 2006), these are more challenging to locate. More clearly, there is actually evidence for the continuation of both 'British' and 'tribal' identities after the end of Roman administration in the early 5th century, particularly from some of the small number of insular written sources, such as inscribed stones (White 2007: 154-76; 202-7), and the 5th/6th century writings of Patrick and Gildas. It is especially notable that both of these authors appear to have abandoned the idea of being Roman (even though they write in Latin), but do identify as Britons (Higham 2002: 39-73; Jones 1996: 121-30). This is suggestive of the fragility of a transcendent imperial/civic identity compared to smaller-scale ethnicities in a post-colonial context (cf. Gardner In Press; Geary 2002: 104-8; Higham 2002: 45-6). This process, explored in more detail in the second half of this paper, is highly relevant to 'Britishness' in the 20th and 21st centuries, and in turn to Brexit.

Another layer of identities was soon introduced to the post-colonial 'British' world of the early Medieval period, in the form of the various groups subsequently labelled 'Anglo-Saxons'. As with the origins of 'Celtic' Britain, there is academic and popular controversy over the scale and nature of the migration of people from northern Germany and southern Scandinavia to eastern Britain (see e.g. Hills 2003; 2011), but this need not concern us here. The key point is that by the 8th and 9th centuries a state was forming that was defined as distinctively English, and the Venerable Bede wrote its history at this time as one of conflict with the Britons. This construct of a division between the English and the Britons would undoubtedly have had an effect on the latter identity too, which may be evident in the archaeology of this period in the west and north (Higham 2002: 59-73, 98-102). Even more crucial to the later history of Britishness, though, is what happened next, as that English state, particularly under the Anglo-Norman kings of the 11th – 13th centuries, embarked upon the first stage in the eventual formation of the British empire, which was the creation of an English empire across Wales, Scotland and Ireland. In the process of doing so, these monarchs, aided by some of those who created histories and other representations of the period, combined military conquest with cultural appropriation. For example, from the 'discovery' and reburial of the purported remains of Arthur and Guinevere in 1191, to the efforts of Edward I to seize Arthurian relics in the 1280s, right through in fact to the Arthurian pageants of Elizabeth I in the 16th century, English monarchs sought to suppress non-English identities through the elimination and/or co-option of British folk figures like King Arthur (Davies 2000: 31-53; Higham 2002: 218-35; cf. Gardner 2011; Paphitis 2014; White 2007: 209-14). As a result, the label 'British' – which had hitherto come to be used particularly by the Welsh to distinguish themselves from the English – was over-written by English power in a nascent English empire (Davies 2000: 31-53). The erasure of the ethnic meaning of Britishness, and the appropriation of some of its key symbols by the English state, meant that after the formal unions of the crowns and then the kingdoms of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland during the 16th – 18th centuries, 'British' identity was free to be taken as the new imperial identity of the now 'United Kingdom', and was also suited to exporting further around the world. Importantly, though, some of the ethnic divisions at home concealed by this new identity were then re-created through the 'discovery' of 'Celtic' heritage for those parts of Britain and Ireland that saw themselves as non-English, effectively perpetuating the symbolic content of the previous notion of 'Britishness' (Colls 2002: 34-49, 275-88; James 1999: 43-66; Kidd 1999: 83-98, 185-93). This latter term would, though, go on to develop a different trajectory in its wider imperial context.

The crucial period for the coalescence of this new version of British identity was the 18th and 19th centuries, following the 1707 Act of Union which created 'Great' Britain, and it gained a particular character influenced by developments such as industrialisation and the American revolution. The latter was particularly important in terms of imperial identities as marking a break between the early colonies associated more firmly with the 'English' empire

and the later colonies in Africa, India and elsewhere that came to play a defining role in 'British' imperialism (Edmunds 2004: 74-5; Ward 2004: 243-5). How 'Britishness' came to be constructed in the ensuing period up to the 20th century is of course a complex story for which space is not available here. The most important point for my argument, though, is that this dynamic identity category had both exclusive and inclusive characteristics, and that while among the former were developing theories of race, particularly in the 19th century, the latter were prominent in the absorption of certain symbols and practices from both the 'internal' (Scottish, Welsh, Irish) and external (particularly Indian and Chinese) edges of empire (Alibhai-Brown 2016; Hechter 1975; Ichijo 2004; Lawrence 2003). A key point of this paper is that this duality of essentialism and hybridity is a crucial part of identity processes in imperial contexts. While a variant of all processes of identity – necessarily involving a dialogue between similarity and difference (Jenkins 2014; cf. Gardner 2011) – there are particular aspects of the interaction between imperial and subaltern actors that give this dynamic a characteristic shape. Partly, of course, these involve imperial violence, something still controversial in the British case but increasingly being brought to light (e.g. Parry 2016), and inevitably a formative influence on the identities of both colonisers and colonised (Colley 1992). This is one part, but not the only part, of the interaction between 'core' and 'peripheral' identities. It is notable that the highpoint of ideological work by the state to create a strong British imperial identity occurred in the later 19th and early 20th centuries, a period when various crises – from the Indian Mutiny in 1857, through the Boer Wars at the end of the 19th century, and up to the First World War – highlighted threats to the empire both within specific territories and from European competitors. While in some sense the new 'Britishness' was thus a nationalist identity, and in some contexts synonymous with 'Englishness', this idea was also successfully exported across the empire, perhaps partly because it was simultaneously a hybrid identity, symbolised by practices derived from colonial contexts, like tea-drinking (Alibhai-Brown 2016: 143-65; Hall 2008; Lawrence 2003; cf. Porter 2004; Young 2008). Even as this empire came relatively rapidly to an end in the mid-20th century, with independence movements coming to a head in the aftermath of the Second World War, many people in former colonies retained a British identity, and much of the post-War migration to the UK from the Caribbean, Africa and South Asia was by people for whom this was a prominent connection. Indeed, it was one entirely encouraged by the British state in the early 1940s and '50s, but significantly curtailed in the 1960s (Ward 2004: 245-58).

This is actually an important part of the context for Brexit, and not just in relation to some of the unedifying attitudes to immigration which characterised the 'leave' campaign and which are often traced back to the 1960s (though, of course, these are another feature of earlier British imperial history too; Colley 1992: 317). My contention is that the relationship of 'British' identity to Brexit has significant implications for other imperial contexts, so this relationship needs careful unpacking. So far we have seen how a British (ethnic) identity born out of Roman imperialism was subordinated to English imperialism, and largely divested of ethnic significance, allowing it to then be re-invented as a more hybrid imperial identity which could unite people in the British Isles and beyond. While at certain points in the later 19th and 20th centuries it came too to have more ethnic significance in the UK, this has retreated in the post-imperial period. As an imperial, encompassing identity, defined by a mixture of symbols drawn from disparate parts of the empire, it seems to have lost currency in parts of the UK itself in the later 20th and early 21st centuries. This is evident from the census data gathered in 2011, which shows that 'English' and other sub-UK national identities are gaining in popularity over 'Britishness', though the latter remains more important among the (overlapping) categories of city-dwellers, younger people, and people with Afro-Caribbean or Asian backgrounds (Easton 2013; cf. Edmunds 2004: 79-82; Madood

2004). Comparing the distribution of the areas with the strongest adherence to the 'home nation' identities with the concentrations of 'leave' voters in the referendum (BBC 2016e) is quite instructive. The correspondence is not absolute, as there are different processes at work here, but I suggest that many of these are legacies of empire, whether in terms of the identity-politics discussed in this paper, or economic inequalities arising from globalisation, which were of course another major factor in the referendum. Scottish self-identity is strong, and arguably this is an example of how a national self-identity can be formed from a colonial one, with many of the archetypal symbols of Scottishness being crafted in the context of English-Scottish relations in the 18th and 19th centuries (Ichijo 2004; Trevor-Roper 1983), and subsequently reinforced also by diaspora communities. This identity is not incompatible with EU sympathies, though, perhaps because it is relatively self-confident and sees commonalities with other small nations that have prospered within the EU; Northern Ireland is somewhat similar. In England and Wales, however, rejection of Britishness goes together with EU-scepticism in many areas, and particularly eastern England (Fig. 1). In Wales, the former could be a reflection of anti-English sentiment (as in Scotland, see e.g. BBC 2014b), but across both countries it seems that – as the founding union of the United Kingdom from the 1530s – these two regions were for so long the 'core' of the British empire that they have faced the biggest identity crisis since the collapse of that empire. Many voters in these regions apparently blame the EU for the erosion of their identity, but it seems more likely from the foregoing that this is actually the consequence of imperial processes (cf. Colley 2007; Kearney 1991; Ward 2004; Yeandle 2004: 286). Over the long-term, 'Britishness' came to be something defined as much from the periphery as the centre. The demise of the empire, combined perhaps with a failure to really deal with its legacy (reflected even since the vote in various positive references to that era; Andrews 2016), has created an identity-vacuum in what was, 500 years ago, the place where it all began. Brexit thus appears to be, at least in part, the latest symptom of the resurgence of pre-British (imperial) identities which are closer to the ancient British (ethnic) identity in form – i.e. it is a post-colonial process in the heart of empire. To understand this complex situation more clearly, and consider further how it might be paralleled in antiquity, we now need to consider briefly recent developments in the theory of borders and frontiers, and their relationship to identity-formation.

Frontiers, boundaries and imperial identities – in theory
'Border Studies' is a relatively new interdisciplinary field drawing upon deeper traditions of enquiry into the nature of frontiers and boundaries. Encompassing the work of scholars in Anthropology, Sociology, International Relations and other areas, this programme has arisen largely out of the realisation that far from generating an entirely 'liquid' world, globalisation has actually led to a renewed phase of national and regional identity formations, or 're-territorialization' (Bude and Dürrschmidt 2010; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: ix, 1-4; Newman 2006). Indeed, these processes must of course be seen as complementary, in a manner already alluded to – hybridity creates essentialism and vice versa in matters of identity (Jenkins 2014: 20-7, 151-8; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 1-25; Rumford 2006). Themes pursued under the Border Studies banner include many contemporary concerns – the new security apparatus of borders (especially since 9/11), or the interwoven issues of citizenship, migration, and labour – and there are a number of different takes on the precise terminology of borders, boundaries and frontiers (Jenkins 2015; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 14-9). A common focus, though, and one which is perhaps exaggerated in, but need not be confined to, modernity is an emphasis on borders as not simply geographical constructs, but as subjective ones which permeate social interactions of all kinds. Moreover, there is considerable attention to the colonial and post-colonial aspects of bordering at both ontological and epistemological levels – that is, in terms of the particular subjectivities of

people for whom colonial bordering is consequential (whether as hybrid identities or 'double consciousness', or indeed considered as part of the colonisers' experience), and also the implications for a discipline's relationship to its object (Alvarez 1995; Kearney 1991; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006). This perspective is evident in some of the anthropological case studies from which a number of scholars have drawn, particularly in the vicinity of the US/Mexico border (e.g. Alvarez 1995), and creates a contrast with some of the more positivist globalization theories with which archaeologists are increasingly engaged (Krishnaswamy 2007: 2; cf. Gardner 2013: 3-9). The outcome of this is a programme of work driven by 'border thinking', seeking to articulate the heterogeneous bordering practices of everyday life which define people as similar or different to each other, and thus both manifest and transform not only identity groupings, but also power relationships (Cooper and Perkins 2011; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009; Rumford 2006). Placing bordering at the heart of social life clearly makes this move relevant to archaeology.

Indeed, one could argue that such a programme is quite well-developed in archaeology, within which a range of studies of frontiers and boundaries (e.g. Lightfoot and Martinez 1995; Stark (ed.) 1998), and of colonial experiences (e.g. Cusick (ed.) 1998; Lightfoot et al. 1998; Stein (ed.) 2005), have moved well beyond simplistic historical-geographical, functionalist, or world-systems approaches to borders (to use the classification of Kolossov 2005). However, what the 'border thinking' programme does is to give us a holistic view of both the centrality of boundaries and boundary-crossing to all human sociality, and the specificity of different constructs of boundedness. This means it provides a useful corrective to some recent work in archaeology, whether in relation to materiality, personhood or sociality, that emphasises networks and flows at the expense of commitment and belonging (cf. Bude and Dürrschmidt 2010), requiring us to balance both of these tendencies in an archaeological project based on charting both fixity and fluidity in practice (cf. Gardner 2011; 2013). Furthermore, in emphasising the heterogeneity of bordering processes as well as the specific dynamics of colonial boundaries criss-crossing both territory and person, insights are afforded into the role of frontiers in the imperial societies of antiquity. This again is not a new subject, but is one which is recently undergoing a fresh lease of life, particularly through more in-depth investigation of interactions across frontiers, especially in the Roman world (e.g. Brather 2005; Miller 1996). The extension of this into the realm of colonial subjectivities, in other words the extension of 'border thinking' away from the *limes* themselves (in the Roman case), seems to be an essential next step in trying to understand such societies. In the first part of this paper, I have tried to construct an argument about the long-term background to Brexit which is in sympathy with the insights of 'border thinking', in terms of the construction of imperial and post-imperial identities in Britain. In the remainder of this paper my aim is to apply them in more detail to a specific window at the beginning of that narrative.

Imperialism, identity and the end of Roman Britain
An important criterion for the success of a theoretical framework is the extent to which it is scalable. So far I have examined in very broad outline the relationship between 'Britishness' and boundaries in the long-term; here I will explore localised bordering practices to see how they shaped imperial identities in the particular period of the 4th and 5th centuries AD, and thus elucidate the comparability of such processes over time. Some of the recent 'border thinking' work emphasises this scale (Newman 2006: 172-3), and here I focus on the archaeology of what is now north-eastern England in the later Roman period. With limited space to go into detail, I will nonetheless highlight certain archaeological patterns indicating changes in the practices of everyday life which reconfigured social boundaries. I will further argue that these can be seen in terms of the long-term cultural dynamics of empire and

specifically the opening-up of gaps between localised identities and civic, imperial identities, even among official representatives of the latter. Both levels of identity exhibit a tension between hybridity and essentialism, but over time it seems that the transcendent imperial Roman identity, while increasingly defined from the frontiers, became detached even in such regions from more potent local, 'ethnic' groupings; this clearly has echoes in the fate of 'Britishness' as already discussed. Here I define 'bordering practices' in an expansive sense, building upon some of the work discussed above (esp. Cooper and Perkins 2011; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009) to encompass all of the different kinds of activity that people do to create and sustain social boundaries, as well as to cross or erode them – since boundary-making and boundary-crossing are mutually constitutive. In tandem with a practice-based approach to archaeological materials (cf. Lightfoot et al. 1998; Gardner 2007), this can be highly productive way to look at past social dynamics.

I have discussed elsewhere (Gardner In Press) some of the broad trends apparent in recent archaeological work in northern England and Wales, the regions which comprise the traditional frontier zones of Roman Britain, and in a forthcoming book I am extending the sort of approach discussed here more widely across Britain and Ireland (Gardner In Prep). Here, there is only space to focus on one area where recent publications shed light on changes in practices at the site level over time, which is the stretch of Dere Street in the region of the Tees and Wear valleys, and some of the surrounding landscape (Fig. 2). This locale is convenient for current purposes not so much because it is relatively close to Hadrian's Wall (a day or so's journey to the north), in the 'military zone' of Roman Britain, but rather because of the mixture of different site types with high-quality new excavation and/or publication of earlier work, including forts and rural sites; David Petts has also recently synthesised much of this work in a highly relevant discussion (2013a). This region provides good evidence for the establishment of Roman occupation and the creation of new social boundaries in the 2nd century AD, particularly in comparison with areas to the north of Hadrian's Wall (Hodgson et al. 2012). What I wish to focus on here, though, is the evidence for the reconfiguring of social boundaries at small scales in the later Roman/early post-Roman period, and how this might relate to the tensions between broad imperial identities and more local, ethnic ones, as discussed above. Three of the fortified locations on Dere Street are particularly interesting in this regard: Piercebridge (Cool and Mason 2008), Binchester (Ferris 2010), and Catterick (Wilson 2002). Each of these forts separately gives evidence, that can also be found at other military sites across the north and indeed elsewhere in Britain (Gardner 2007: 166-86, 224-9; cf. Collins 2012: 74-110) of two key archaeological trends which relate to bordering practices in the later 4th and early 5th centuries.

One of these trends has to do with the maintenance and even reinforcement of defences, which often stands out amidst limited evidence for new structural work in later Roman forts. This is evident at Piercebridge, where there are signs that the later 3rd-century gate within the excavated area (the east gate) was narrowed, and a ditch dug beyond it, at a late 4th or early 5th century date (Cool and Mason 2008: 302-12); similar evidence has been noted at several other northern forts (Collins 2012: 81-88). By way of contrast, the second trend concerns the uses of spaces in the interior of forts, and potentially the breaking down of boundaries. Here, Binchester has an important sequence of evidence suggesting that the predictable hierarchical organisation of the garrison unit, as reflected in the parts of the commanding officer's house which have been excavated, were very pronounced even up until around the end of the 4th century, before parts of the complex were turned over to rubbish-dumping, smithing and animal-penning (Ferris 2010: 551-60). This, along with similar evidence from a barrack in the fort's eastern corner, has persuasively been described by Petts (2013a: 319-22, 330) as an indication of social 'convergence' among previously-divided people, and he rightly points out that this might apply across a number of locations with

similar kinds of evidence for the turning over of previously segregated spaces to rubbish-disposal in the late 4th century (cf. Gardner 2007: 172-83). As a significant part of the activity evidenced here seems to relate to animal management and butchery, this could also indicate that local dependencies were negotiated through communal activities like feasting, rather than official roles and statuses (cf. White 2007: 163-4). Local rural sites provide some important context for these changes, though while several more are known than used to be the case, particularly of the more elaborate 'villa' type that was thought to be very rare in the north, their numbers are still insufficient to generalise (cf. Allen et al. 2015). One key farmstead, at Faverdale, flourishes earlier than the period of focus here, seemingly a high-status site with evidence for a good deal of colonial hybridity in the 2nd century, but with a reduced level of activity, and more regional material culture, in the 4th (Proctor 2012: 165-77). The 'villa' at Ingleby Barwick, by contrast, has some indications that it was home to high-status individual(s), perhaps with military connections, in the late 4th century, and added some imported material culture to its regional suite, evident for example in the pottery assemblage (Petts 2013b; Petts 2013a: 325-8). Such connections between 'military' and 'civilian' sites, to the extent that they are difficult to distinguish materially, are characteristic of the period, and evidence from Catterick for overlaps between the 'fort' and 'town' parts of this site (Wilson 2002: 458-75) fits the picture too.

This picture, then, comprises evidence for new forms of boundary-making and boundary-crossing within an imperial frontier zone. This zone has evidence for the gradual transformation of novel – but already hybridised (cf. Dench 2005) – 'Roman' imperial identities into more locally-rooted hybrids which – as most of these sites have sequences going well beyond the end of Roman administration at the beginning of the 5th century – seem to hold the potential to form the basis of post-colonial identities. Fortified places remained important in this landscape (Ferris 2010: 566-70; Petts 2013a: 322-9), but simultaneously appear to have become more fully socially integrated with that landscape than hitherto. Some such links may even extend beyond the line of Hadrian's Wall (Hunter 2010). Whether such patterns fully provided the resources for a 'British', as opposed to regional, identity is difficult to judge, partly because few artefact types survive the economic changes following on from Roman administrative withdrawal, and partly because our later 'British' written sources do not clearly articulate this identity in material terms, but rather in terms of Christianity vis-à-vis the pagan Saxons, and indeed the role of the church in social relations at this time is probably very significant (Higham 2002: 59-72). However, it is ironic – but quite telling – that these Christian writers do not associate their religious identity with 'Romanness'. Overall, therefore, the trajectory of a gradually-developing imbalance between a fragile imperial identity and a localised alternative, which seems to tip toward the latter in a short time, seems clear. One interesting question is whether this process is a cause or a symptom of imperial 'collapse'. In Britain, the cessation of imperial administration, partly prompted by local revolts according to some of the written sources (Dark 1994: 58), comes in the first decade or so of the 5th century, just after these archaeological phenomena become really evident. Yet it seems likely that many features of the late Roman state, from increasing bureaucracy to more centralising ideologies – evident in law-codes and imperial art – are responses to centrifugal forces in the frontier provinces developing from the later 3rd century onwards (see e.g. Miller 1996; cf. Gardner 2007: 247-61). This might be paralleled by the increased state attention to 'Britishness' in the later 19th and early 20th centuries, at the time of greatest pressure on that notion. Moreover, if the development of distinctive frontier cultures which gradually transform the 'core' is a feature of at least the British and Roman empires, then we can also suggest that empires tend to precisely create the circumstances of their own fragmentation, and that – as Brexit shows – the 'core' is not immune to any of

these effects. Exploring the wider significance of this provides a final note on which to conclude this paper.

Conclusions: the ironies of empire

Comparison between the post-imperial British context of Brexit and the situation in late Roman Britain is not a perfectly symmetrical exercise. One problem is that, as outlined in the section dealing with the long-term history of 'Britishness', these are causally-connected rather than independent comparanda. Clearly, I have also focussed on Britain throughout when an equally apt comparison to post-imperial (modern) Britain might be post-imperial (Roman) Italy. There are other challenges, too, with the enterprise of imperial comparisons (cf. Hingley 2000; Vasunia 2011), which themselves have a chequered history. I hope, though, to have shown in the intertwined cases discussed here some of the complexity of the processes of imperial and post-colonial or post-imperial identity formation. The basic principles at work here are actually easy to state: like all identity processes, the formation of identities involves dialogue between similarity and difference, and between labels and practices (Jenkins 2014). In imperial contexts, though, the frequently simultaneous construction of hybrid practices and identities alongside supposedly 'pure' cultural ideas of self and other, which buttress more essentialist identities, is shaped in complex ways by dynamics of power and inequality, and the threat or perpetration of violence (cf. Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: viii, 14-5). These are part-and-parcel of the process of imperialism itself, from conquest and expansion, through to fragmentation, collapse, and the formation of new political entities in the aftermath of empire – crucially both in the colonies and the colonizing 'core'. While imperial frontiers produce hybrid formations which in turn shape 'imperial' identities, they also form new ethnicities in those locations; meanwhile, the 'imperial' identity, in ceasing to correspond to other identities at the 'core', begets new (or renewed) ethnic divisions there too (Kearney 1991: 62, 69). Recognising this sort of process is not only significant for archaeologies of empires, but hopefully offers something of more contemporary significance too.

The deep history of bordering practices, subaltern subjectivities, and the transformations of imperial identities over time help us, I would argue, to understand some of what is currently happening in the world today in terms of identity politics, and Brexit provides a clear illustration of this, as I hope to have shown. Here it is appropriate to return to the intersection of the personal, the political and the academic. Of course this is an ever-present balance that we all try to sustain; our interests and politics shape our work, but generally we also strive for inter-subjective, if not objective, coherence. I have written this paper in part as therapy for a traumatic event, because that is how I view the vote to leave the EU. I think that the EU represents a way of moving forward politically that might break the cycle of nationalist and imperial projects which have dominated European history. While it has its weaknesses as an institution, particularly in relation to finding a humane 'frontier policy' at the present moment (Hingley In Prep; cf. Pluciennik 1998), I believe it has done, and can do, more good than harm. I also believe that throwing up barriers does more harm than good. But that is why in this paper I have sought to better understand the processes by which boundaries do get re-made, in the hope that this can inform future debate, which is an academic as well as a personal response. Moreover, uncovering some of the paradoxes of identity-processes sheds some light on the seemingly puzzling ironies of a situation like Brexit. The circumstances which many English and Welsh people seem unhappy about – immigration, the export of manufacturing jobs and so on – are consequences of the existence of the British empire; some former colonies – in the British Isles and overseas – have forged a stronger sense of identity than the centre; and 'Britishness' has now again the potential to be a successful hybrid identity favoured by more of the young voters who are also

enthusiastic about the EU. Identity politics is riven with complexity and contradiction, and its past tense no less so. If the referendum vote tells us anything about the direction of travel, we will need to work hard to defend a nuanced perspective on such matters in an increasingly polarised and reductive climate.

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Figure Captions

Fig. 1: Data from the 2011 census for England, with darker shades showing higher percentages of 'English' identification (a), and the referendum results (b) (James Trimble & http://ukdataexplorer.com/census/england/; Taylor 2016; both with permission).

Fig. 2: Location map of sites mentioned in the text, with other key sites and the line of Hadrian's Wall marked (Digital Atlas of the Roman Empire [http://dare.ht.lu.se/], under Creative Commons BY-SA 3.0 Licence, with permission, and with additions).

[Locus] Maponi?
Blatobulgium
Fanum Cocidi
Castra Exploratorum
*Vercovicium
Cilurnum
Onnum
Aesica Vindolanda
*Camboglanna
*Coriciopitum
Vindovala
Condercum
Pons Aeli
Arbeia
Maia
Aballava
Uxelodunum
LUGUVALIUM
Vindompra
Bribra?
Magione
Epiakon
Longovicium
Cocanges
Voreda
Alauna
Derventio
Binchester
Vinovia
Magis?
Gabrosentum
Brocavum
Bravoniacum
Piercebridge
Faverdale
Ingleby Barwick
Dictum?
Tunnocelum
*Medibogdo
Galava
Verteris
Lavatris
Catterick
Cataractonium
*Glannoventa
Alauna?
Viroaidum
Kalagon
Derventio
Calunium?
ISURIUM
Delgovicia?
Praesidium
Portus Setantiorum
Olenacum?
Verbeia?
EBURACUM
Delgovicia
Calcaria