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CC 230 Fall of Rome

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The Use of Roman Architecture and its Effect on People and Space in Roman Britain

When the people sculpt the landscape, especially the most wealthy and elite subsection of the people, the landscape can then in turn sculpt the people. When Roman architecture was introduced to Britain, the Romans made their presence known, both physically and ideologically. The incorporation of Roman architecture played a significant role in the process of the Romanization of Britain, because cultural and social customs shaped how people interacted with space. The alteration of space in Roman Britain enforced certain social rituals enmeshing themselves into the cultural network, incentivizing the desire for Roman citizenship or alignment with “Roman-ness,” as well as altering how people interacted with space and the natural resources surrounding them in order to support Roman structures such as amphitheaters, theaters, circuses, baths, and Roman houses such as villas.

The beginning of Rome’s materially apparent relationship with the physical sculpting of Britain’s landscape into a recognizably Romanized one was when Emperor Claudius spearheaded the invasion of Britain in 43 AD. Over the next 50 years Rome established itself as the dominant ruling power over Britain, beginning with the gradual Romanization of Southeastern. This process was disrupted in 60 AD with the revolt of Boudicca. Then, with the beginning of the Flavian period and the accession of Emperor Vespasian in 69 AD, the Romanization of British territories was renewed with greater vigor as an active military presence

in Northern Britain and the funding of building programs in Southern Britain was established. (Perring 2002, 6)

The introduction of Roman public buildings to Roman Britain signified the passage of Roman values and practices into a previously non-Roman society. The presence of these buildings and their functions shaped the people who interacted with that space's perception of Roman culture and values and incentivized a desire for Roman citizenship. The proliferation of these buildings showcased the wealth and power of Roman society and inoculated non-Romans in the social customs surrounding traditional Roman entertainment. Triumphal arches are a prime example of the use of spectacle to showcase Rome's power, built often in celebration of a military victory, arches were splendid displays of wealth which simultaneously worked as propaganda for military and political leaders as well as for the cultural richness and economic success of Rome itself. The function of public entertainment buildings, such as amphitheaters, theaters, and circuses, were important to the expansion of Roman culture into Roman Britain. The arenas of amphitheaters served as stages for gladiatorial combat and *venationes*, combat between man and beast, as well as the execution of criminals (Collingwood and Richmond 1969, 120). The chariot races of circuses were, comparatively, significantly less violent yet inspired great fanaticism and team loyalty in those who attended, and often incited historical riots among the Romans. The observance of violent entertainment possibly served as an outlet for discontent "Roman society was one in which the infliction of pain and the mutilation of another's body were considered appropriate methods of establishing the authority of the ruling class and enforcing submission. Most citizens had few rights, but enslaved persons had no rights at all. People who themselves felt powerless and brutalized perhaps found some satisfaction in watching the infliction of pain on others" (Shelton and Ripat 2023, 461). What can be drawn

from this speculation is that the normalization of great public congregations can form a sense of shared identity, and united by the enjoyment of Roman entertainment, the idolization of Roman culture and desire for citizenship can breed. Roman theaters staged Roman plays, which often served as propaganda and instilled Roman values. Plays were instrumental in spreading the Latin language, philosophy, Roman mythology and religion, aspects of Hellenistic culture, and more within the provinces. The lure of entertainment often drew non-Romans to Rome and is what caused many people to live in cramped apartments for the same price as better housing in rural territories. The spectacle of the buildings which housed the desired entertainment aligned the Roman identity with the concept of wealth, luxury, and excitement, all which served as an incentive for Roman citizenship.

Interaction with Roman building styles in Roman provinces often resulted in new innovations blending the original culture's practices with Roman styles in order to adapt to the land in which this architectural style was not naturally developed. Additionally, many provinces did not have the natural landscape, or resources, suited for the construction of large Roman-style buildings. To work around the physical limitations of the land, architects learned to use the locally unique cultural building styles and resources in new ways to accommodate Roman styles which would have been previously considered unsuited and inhospitable to the land. An example is found in Lycian developments in Roman bath construction,

Lycian baths display an architectural uniformity also by their average size, which was determined by land constraints, irregular topography and use of local material in the form of coursed or polygonal masonry. According to Farrington, the use of polygonal masonry for the load-bearing walls of free-standing buildings is unique to Lycia. The polygonal masonry which was probably utilized due to its quick production process and convenience it offered to the local masons who were already skilled in the technique, can be observed in other buildings dated to the Roman times. (Ercan 2022, 29-30)

Lycian cities consistently utilized a common “row arrangement” style of Roman baths which display remarkable similarities to the Republican Period “Pompeian/Campanian” type bath and is thought to have been imported to Lycia directly by Imperial authorities (Ercan 2022, 29) as the traditionally Roman building style best suited for the unique land constraints of Lycia. A typical Roman bath included a series of temperature-controlled rooms; the three basic foundational types of rooms were the *frigidarium*, the *tepidarium*, and the *caldarium*. The bather would proceed through each room, removing dirt from the skin with an oiled scraper, or *strigil*, and then again backwards, concluding with a “cold douche or plunge” (Collingwood and Richmond 1969, 111). Many public baths found in modern Silchester, Hampshire conform to a military-style plan since, being in a frontier province, simplified bath houses were built for military forts, and then later when the town wanted to construct public bathing establishments, these buildings would have been designed and constructed by architects who were either actively in the military and assigned by the governor to do so or retired from the military but had experience and now worked in a private capacity (Perring 2002, 112). The introduction of bathing culture into Britain developed a new social culture which had a dramatic effect on the people's relationship with water. Society adapted to a sudden and rapid increase in the use of water, incomparable to the standard set by the community previously.

Aqueducts normally deliver a constantly running supply of water. Such a supply was not essential to the survival of any ancient community, but it did facilitate the functioning of urban life. Thus aqueducts were not essential to the functioning of municipal thermae, but it can hardly be a coincidence that the fortress bath-house at Chester, for example, was constructed in 79, the same year that its water mains were manufactured. (Stephans 1985, 197-8)

The decoration of bath houses, as well as water features and fountains, resulted in a new decorative relationship with water, and the practice of bathing becoming a social one, as well as recreational instead of a needs-based practice. The idea the Roman government could take care

of its citizens' needs so well and the state could afford to provide its people with public amenities such as those found in a Roman bath solidified the image of a wealthy and powerful Rome filled with a rich social culture.

Public architecture was not the only influential form of building which contributed to Romanization within Britain, private property, such as villas, had a significant effect too. The transformation of the architectural style and construction of the domestic space within Roman Britain signaled a shift in the wider cultural values assigned to the domestic space. The presence of archetypically "Roman" domestic structures did not universally signal that the inhabitants were themselves Roman but did signal the presence of Roman social customs and values as desirable for a non-Roman to own an archetypically Roman house. "The changes represented in the architecture were not only willed by the administration but also the consequence of elective affiliation, reinforced by peer-group competition" (Perring 2002, 213). Local elites, who could afford to own land and construct private homes, began to build and live in Roman-style private homes for a variety of reasons. The Roman villa was a status symbol. Romans often granted local elites with Roman citizenship as the Roman identity within provinces became associated with wealth and power, and aligning oneself with Roman-ness was increasingly desirable. "They [houses] were seats of power and stages for the performance of domestic ritual" (Perring 2002, 3). By constructing the archetypically Roman home structure, the social customs and traditions deeply ingrained and associated with this structure, consequently, were accepted to become more Romanized. The Roman home was a center for Roman social activity, such as dinner parties and literature recitations, often of classic Roman or Greek literature. The rooms associated with these practices promoted the Roman social customs within, such as the reception halls known as the *atrium* and *tablinum* function of receiving guests for *salutation*, morning greetings, and the

structure of the *triclinium* being specifically suited for the Roman style of dining with guests

“The Roman house was designed around these social activities, and involved a public approach to domestic space. Wallace-Hadrill has emphasized the significance that was attached to the grant of privileged access to more intimate spaces and activities within the house” (Perring 2002, 18).

Traditionally Roman associations and groups such as burial clubs, collegia, and guilds, consisting of largely land-owning men, likely existed in Roman Britain and often partook in these Roman social rituals surrounding and centered around meeting in the Roman home (Perring 2002, 170-1). Therefore, the existence of Roman-style private homes in Roman Britain were likely to have been instrumental in the survival and subsistence of Roman social tradition in the provinces.

Cultural associations of Roman architecture with luxury and success have persisted into modern day culture. Important political structures in modern day Britain overwhelming use of Hellenistic culture and architectural styles to convey a sense of grandeur and opulence. On March 15, 1604, King James I's (delayed) ceremonial entry into his new capital after his coronation, to decorate his processional route from the Tower of London to the Strand, temporary Triumphal Arches in the style of those found in Roman antiquity were constructed. The arches were made of wood and plaster, then gilded and painted and the largest was 90 feet tall and 70 feet wide. At each arch, the procession would pause for it to be admired and a musical performance would be held (MacGregor 2012, 49). Societies influenced by Romanization persist in their display of the use of Roman cultural tradition as a vehicle for legitimacy and social power using Roman tradition and material culture, well into modernity.

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