RELIGION

IN LATE ROMAN

BRITAIN

FORCES OF CHANGE

DOROTHY WATTS

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Dorothy Watts

London and New York

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PREFACE

Since writing *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain* (published in 1991), I have been concerned that Christianity in Late Roman Britain not be viewed as something which sprang Athena-like and fully armed from the head of Zeus; rather, it was a religion which developed, reached its apogee and subsequently faltered as it reacted to the forces which operated around and even against it in the late fourth century. In *Christians and Pagans* I sought to map out the extent of Christianity from the literary and archaeological evidence, and to show that it was far more widespread and had more pagan content than had previously been thought. What I did not explore then was the chronology of Christianity in Roman Britain, nor did I look at what was happening in the non-Christian cults or what had been the causes of the changes in religion in the last century of Roman occupation there.

Religion in Late Roman Britain seeks to address those questions. It makes use of the identification of cemeteries and churches already made in the earlier work. It also casts the net wider to include what I hope will be a useful study of some pagan practices, including the much-debated rite of decapitated burial, and the fate of the pagan cults as well. The whole has been set against the political and economic background of the fourth and early fifth centuries, and particularly the events in the Western Empire.

The investigation has traced the rise of Christianity in the fourth century, the effects of the revival of paganism by Julian the Apostate and of policies of religious toleration by his successors, and has sought to explain why Christianity failed to become the dominant religion in Britain as it had elsewhere in the Roman Empire. At the same time an analysis has been made of the types of pagan cults which survived up to and beyond the withdrawal of the Romans. The question of syncretism as a feature of Romano-British religion is also discussed.

This work will, it is hoped, provoke further comment and debate; only by re-examining the evidence, both historical and archaeological, and combining that with new finds can we hope to advance knowledge in this important aspect of Romano-British studies.

My research has been made immeasurably easier with the recent publication of some key archaeological reports, many of the details of which were not accessible previously. Other reports have yet to be published, and it is my pleasure to thank the following for permission to use unpublished material: Mr D.G.Benson (Rushton Mount), Mr R.A.Chambers (Oxfordshire decapitations), Mr B.Dix (Ashton), Emeritus Prof. P.A.Rahtz (Cannington), Mr B.R.G. Turner (Witham) and Mr D.Wilson (Ancaster). For permission to reprint an article in *Britannia* on the lead tank fragment from Brough, I thank the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies. I should also like to record my gratitude to the following academics and archaeologists for information, advice and for long and sometimes passionate discussions about various aspects of a project which has been carried on over the past six years, generally in the depths of the northern winter: Mr D.G.Benson, Prof. K.Branigan, Mr I. Caruana, Mr R.A.Chambers, Mr J.Casey, Prof. J.Collis, Ms N. Crummy, Mr P.Crummy, Bro. E.deBhaldraithe, Dr A.Detsicas, Mr B.Dix, Mr R.Feachem, Rev. Emeritus Prof. W.H.C.Frend, Ms C. Johns, Mr M.Jones, Mr D.Knight, Mr P.Leach, Mr J.Magilton, Dr A.McWhirr, Mr I.Meadows, Mr D.Miles, Prof. M.Millett, Mr C.Newman, Ms R.Niblett, Dr E.O'Brien, Emeritus Prof. P.A. Rahtz, Dr R.Reece, Dr A.Ross, Prof. E.Rynne, Ms L.Watts and Dr A.Woodward.

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Long-suffering family members and friends have probably by now grown accustomed to being deserted at Christmas as I travel to the other end of the world in response to the call of my Muse. To them and to my 'adopted family' in Sheffield I express my appreciation for their love and support. Klio and Apollo have much to answer for.

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Brisbane, Australia
March 1997

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HISTORICAL
BACKGROUND AD 294–360

By the mid-fourth century of the Christian era, Britain had been part of the Roman Empire for over 300 years. Once divided up by tribes which did not always peacefully co-exist, it was progressively conquered by the Roman army and became one, two and ultimately five[1] Roman provinces. These were administered from Rome through provincial governors, if necessary with the help of the large army which was stationed there. The Romans brought not only peace and the material trappings of *romanitas* but also their language, culture and religion. The historian Tacitus (*Agric.* 21) describes how the native aristocracy, at least, readily adopted Roman ways:

> [Agricola]…provided a liberal education for the sons of the chiefs, and showed such a preference for the natural powers of the Britons over the industry of the Gauls that they who lately disdained the tongue of Rome now coveted its eloquence. Hence, too, a liking sprang up for our style of dress, and the toga became fashionable. Step by step they were led to…the lounge, the bath, the elegant banquet.

As a general policy, Rome had always practised tolerance towards the religions of a conquered people, provided there was no threat to the state. The influence of the Druids had been regarded by Caesar with a certain amount of macabre fascination (e.g. *B.G.* 6.13–16). Augustus also tolerated their activities, banning their cults only to citizens, but Tiberius took steps to abolish the Druids in Gaul, and Claudius their practices (Pliny *N.H.* 30.13; Suetonius *Claud.* 25.5). After the conquest of Britain, the Druids on Anglesey were seen to be subversive and were eliminated[2] by Suetonius Paulinus (Tacitus *Ann.* 14.30; Dio *Epit.* 52.7).[3] Some of the activities associated

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with their religion which were abhorrent to the Romans, such as human sacrifice, headhunting and even cannibalism, were rigorously suppressed (Strabo 4.4.5; Pliny *N.H.* 30.13).

The cults of Iron Age Britain were many and varied, frequently animistic, and usually associated with war, nature or fertility: the earth itself, the sun, trees or groves, streams, marshes, animals and birds were invested with religious significance. There were few cult buildings or anthropomorphic representations of deity. On the other hand, the religious practices of the conqueror were well developed, and gradually the native people came to build temples (mostly of a distinctively 'Romano-Celtic' type, rather than the classical style), to represent their gods as humans, and to bury their dead more in the Roman way. It may be that they also adopted Roman gods, or conflated them with their own.[4] There was at least a veneer of Romanisation. Certainly cults which were followed by Romans themselves were found where acculturation was at its greatest: in the towns, the 'villa belts' and areas of occupation by the Roman army.

As in other parts of the empire, the Imperial Cult was introduced and formed part of the official religious life of the province after initial opposition and revolt (Tacitus *Ann.* 14.31). To Britain also came Jupiter, Juno, Minerva and a host of lesser gods, along with more exotic imports such as Cybele, Isis, Mithras and Bacchus.

Some time in the late second or early third century, Christianity reached Britain. The peak of expansion was probably *c.* 340–60. After this, the impetus seemed to have slowed, and in some parts halted altogether. In line with events at Rome, paganism revived to some extent in the years 360–90, but in Britain it seems to have been mainly in Celtic form. Despite Theodosius' closure of the temples and banning of pagan cults in 391, Christianity failed to become established by the end of the fourth century, as it had in the Eastern Empire and in Gaul, as the dominant religion.

The reasons for the failure of Christianity and for the resurgence of paganism in Britain are manifold. The present work is intended to determine what changes occurred in religion in Britain in the late fourth century, to examine the forces that contributed to them and to assess the state of religion at the time of the withdrawal of the official Roman presence by AD 410. It is helpful to begin by looking at the empire as a whole.

The empire: Diocletian, Constantine and his house[5]

The third century was, for the Roman Empire, one of turmoil and uncertainty. Serious problems included spiralling inflation, an out-of-control army, and barbarian incursions. Frequent political assassinations and usurpations, resulting in the rapid turnover of emperors, also contributed to the degeneration of the empire. This was temporarily arrested by the actions of the emperor Diocletian, who, having seized power nine years earlier, proceeded to introduce administrative and constitutional reforms. In 293 he divided the state into East and West,[6] each with its own head or Augustus and a junior Caesar to provide practical (military) support and a peaceful succession.

Diocletian's reforms, dependent as they were on mutual cooperation and trust between members of the tetrarchy, proved to be unworkable, and during the fourth century various ambitious and capable generals were able to achieve sole power, or to be the senior Augustus dominating a weaker partner.

It was against this background that Christianity came to be, first, the religion of the imperial family, a religion tolerated by the state and, finally, by the end of the century, the official religion of the empire. Yet this progress was not without setbacks, as a brief survey of the years 294–361 (below) and 361–91 (Chapter 2) will show.

By the end of the third century, Christianity had expanded greatly (Eusebius *H.E.* 8.1.1). Whole towns in the eastern part of the empire had become Christian[7] and North Africa was rapidly doing the same. While it was generally the ordinary folk who were attracted to the faith, there were converts even in high positions in the imperial administration. These were to be especial targets for persecution.

It is not known precisely why Diocletian instituted one of the most severe persecutions against Christians in 303. It may have been the result of his inherently conservative nature that he saw the Christians as a threat to the religion of the state, and thus to the state itself. His Caesar in the east, Galerius, was a fierce pagan. At first, martyrdoms, a feature of earlier persecutions,[8] were avoided. Instead Diocletian concentrated on the fabric of the Church—buildings and copies of Scripture. Christians lost their positions in public office. But successive imperial edicts increased the intensity of the purge, and Christian lives were lost when, with the fourth edict, all citizens of the empire were required to sacrifice on pain of death.

In the Western Empire, the Augustus, Maximian, and his Caesar, Constantius (father of Constantine), carried out the persecution with far less zeal. Lactantius (*De Mort. Pers.* 15.7) and Eusebius (*H.E.* 8.13.13) tell us that Constantius, who was responsible for Britain, Spain, Gaul and the Rhineland, took little action against Christians. Church buildings seem to have been the main casualties. Indeed, there is no certainty that the edict concerning sacrifice was ever proclaimed in the Western Empire (A.H.M.Jones 1964:72).

Although the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian in 305 did not bring Christians any immediate respite from their sufferings, the next quarter of a century was to prove the most significant period in the growth of Christianity since the apostolic era. Constantine had been passed over in the formation of the Second Tetrarchy of 305 (Galerius and Constantius as Augusti, Maximin and Severus as Caesars) and was named Caesar only in 306, despite his having been acclaimed Augustus by the army on his father's death at York. Yet in a series of manoeuvres, he came to be in a strong position to achieve sole power. He married the daughter of the old Emperor Maximian, who had come out of retirement to support the campaign of his son, Maxentius, for the throne, and also bestowed on his son-in-law the title of Augustus. In 308, at a conference at Carnuntum, Constantine refused to resign as Augustus and take instead the title *filius Augusti*. In his way were (by now) three other Augusti,[9] Galerius, Licinius and Maximin[10] and, by 310, the renegade Maxentius.

Up to this point there had been no indication of Constantine's turning to Christianity, but that was to change. Galerius died in 311, after a deathbed edict putting an end to the persecution of Christians. Maximin moved quickly east to take over Galerius' eastern dominions and once more institute a harsh persecution.[11] He may have formed some kind of an alliance with Maxentius, who had been declared a public enemy in 308 but was still head of an army and gaining ground. Constantine and Licinius were each marshalling armies. It was the former who met Maxentius in battle near the Milvian Bridge outside Rome in 312. His victory, with the help of the God of the Christians (Eusebius *V. Const.* 1.28; Lactantius *De Mort. Pers.* 44), sealed his commitment to Christianity, and changed the western world for the next sixteen centuries. Maximin died a fugitive in 313, and in the same year an Edict of Toleration (the so-called Edict of Milan) was issued by Constantine and Licinius. Licinius, however, later reneged on this agreement and was ousted by his fellow Augustus. In 324 Constantine became

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sole emperor, and the House of Constantine the powerful patrons of Christianity throughout the empire.

Constantine's conversion, while not necessarily a smooth progression spiritually, had an immediate and far-reaching effect materially. Impressive churches sprang up, those in Italy and at Rome and Jerusalem in particular being heavily endowed from the royal purse. The influence of men such as Lactantius and Eusebius of Caesarea (Frend 1984:482–7, 502–5) ensured that the clergy had privilege and immunities, and eventually the status of magistrates. Funds flowed into the imperial coffers with the confiscation of temple treasure, and were disbursed to family, friends and the Church.

This positive advancement for Christianity was, however, marred by schisms and reprisal. The first, arising in 311, was a movement led by Donatus against the supposed 'traitors' to the faith during the persecutions in North Africa; Constantine's personal intervention failed to suppress the Donatists or to produce Church unity. In the east, a doctrinal dispute led to the rise of Arianism. Arius, a presbyter at Alexandria, had questioned the nature of the Trinity and for his pains was exiled in 318–19. He reappeared in Nicomedia, Licinius' eastern capital, whence his teachings took root and spread. The Council of Nicaea of 325, convened and chaired by Constantine, reinforced orthodoxy by producing the Nicaean Creed. Conciliation later brought the two sides together, yet Arius and his doctrine remained to simmer in the east.

Constantine died in 337, but his hopes that political and religious peace would be maintained were in vain. Although he had planned the restoration of the tetrarchy, the army had other ideas, and in September of 337 they acclaimed his three remaining sons,[12] Constantine II, Constantius II and Constans, as Augusti. Their territories were the western provinces, the eastern provinces, and Italy and North Africa, respectively. Other male family members, with the exception of the young Julian and his half-brother Gallus, were murdered. The triumvirate had a short life, however. Constantine died in an attempt on the domains of Constans in 340, after which Constans came to control the greater part of the empire (including Britain). Constans himself was murdered by the rebellious Magnentius in 350; and Constantius, after finally defeating Magnentius in 353, became sole ruler until his death in 361.

The sons of Constantine had been brought up as Christians, and were all, in their own way, totally committed to the Christian cause, although Constantius leaned towards Arianism and his brothers to orthodoxy. During the years 337–60 Christianity continued to

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make great advances, despite the recalcitrance of some bishops (especially Athanasius of Alexandria, a passionate opponent of Arianism), the resurgence of Donatism in Africa and the continued existence of Arius' doctrines in the East. Bans increased against paganism, temples were closed (*C. Th.* 16.10.3–4) and altars removed. Among these was the Altar of Victory from the Senate House in Rome, when Constantius visited the city in 357 (Ambrose *Ep.* 18.32; Ammianus 16.10.1). This was to be a bone of contention with pagan senators until almost the end of the century (see below, Chapter 2). The clergy and the Church gained a privileged position,[13] financial immunities to clergy were extended and even allowed to their children, and the wealthy admitted to orders without having to surrender their property. Part of state funds was directed to the Church in some provinces. Throughout the empire the religion expanded and flourished. The growth of the Church in distant Britain was also probably the result of these stimuli during the reign of the sons of Constantine.

Britain: paganism and the rise of Christianity

As noted earlier, by the fourth century Britain had long been part of the empire, although Romanisation does not seem to have been as thoroughgoing as it had been elsewhere.[14] Resistance to the Occupation from AD 43 had generally been firm and prolonged; the attempted conquest of Scotland had had to be abandoned along with the wall built in the time of the Antonines. Clearly the people of Britannia were less amenable than many others conquered by Rome. But conquered they were and, by the end of the second century or early into the third, peace prevailed in the lowlands, and was restored[15] in the territory north, up to the wall built by Hadrian. Yet even then Romanisation was not adopted with great enthusiasm in many parts.

It is likely that this resistance to *romanitas* was reflected in religion in much of the province. That Britons initially opposed the Imperial Cult and what it stood for cannot be doubted. Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.31–2) tells us that the temple of Claudius in Colchester, built in the 50s,[16] was a prime target in the revolt begun by Boudicca in 60/1.[17] The failure to build temples in the classical style also suggests a reluctance to adopt Roman ways. Very few were built during more than 300 years of occupation.[18] Of those that Lewis (1966) categorises as classical, only two, the one at Colchester and another at Bath, have origins in the first or early second century.

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The Bath temple had Celtic connections, perhaps making it more acceptable to a suspicious native population. The building probably dates to the late first century (Blagg 1979) and is dedicated to Sulis-Minerva. Sulis was a Celtic deity, one of whose aspects was healing. She could thus be equated by the Romans with Minerva Medica (Henig 1984:43). While the temple itself exhibits many of the characteristics of Roman architecture, it has at the centre of its pediment a representation of a fierce male head usually interpreted as a male Medusa or Neptune (Henig 1984:43) or a Gorgon (Richmond and Toynbee 1955; Lewis 1966:60), the usual decoration on the aegis of Minerva.[19] The Celtic aspects of the visage have been noted.[20] Lead curse tablets *(defixiones)* from the sacred pool are mostly addressed or refer to Sulis or Sulis Minerva. Tomlin (1988:80, 96–8) points out that the names of the petitioners are those of 'humbler people', not of legionaries such as were recorded on stone altars and tombstones at Bath.

To the casual observer, the temple of Sulis-Minerva at Bath could be interpreted as a demonstration of the early Romanisation of the native population, and the syncretic nature of Romano-British religion. Such perceptions will be discussed more fully later (Chapter 6), but it might be pointed out here that the lack of evidence for any continuation of the 'tradition of sanctity' (Lewis 1966:50) in the siting of classical temples in Britain suggests that, initially, they had very little to do with the native population. Although it is unlikely that the hot springs at Bath escaped the religious devotion of Iron Age Britons, it is not certain that the actual site of the temple of Sulis-Minerva was previously the location of a native shrine or sacred place. There is little pre-Roman evidence for religious or even domestic activity. There is no known evidence for any pre-Roman cults at the sites of the other classical temples, all of which were built in the later second or early third century.[21]

This is far from the case with the more common type of temple found in Britain, the Romano-Celtic, a style normally with a square cella-and-ambulatory plan found also on the Continent. Lewis (1966:9) is probably correct in suggesting that this type of temple first emerged in Gaul, the result of Roman architectural influences on the simpler Celtic religious structures,[22] and was carried to Britain after the Occupation. A number from rural Britain have certain or almost certain Iron Age predecessors (see below), but none from urban centres.

It seems that Romano-Celtic temples appeared in Britain first in the towns, and later in the country (Lewis 1966:51–5; Horne 1981:

Figure 3.1), surviving longer in the rural areas. Only one Romano-Celtic temple in Britain can so far be dated to before the Boudiccan revolt and that, significantly, comes from close by the earliest Roman settlement, at Colchester.[23] It may well be that, where Roman influence was strongest, a move to erect religious structures new in design but in reality very little removed from those of the Iron Age was fairly well received by wealthy Britons. In the country, however, the old sacred places or simple shrines would usually suffice sometimes for one, two or even three centuries before a cella-and-ambulatory structure appeared (for example, Maiden Castle and Harlow). One exception to this is the Romano-Celtic temple at Hayling Island, built on the site of an earlier Iron Age shrine *c.* AD 60–70; but the excavator points out that this temple was built in a tribal area which saw very early Roman building activity, in particular the 'palace' at Fishbourne (King 1990:231). A further exception is the first Romano-Celtic temple at Uley. It will be considered later in this study (Chapter 6). Few new urban Romano-Celtic temples appear in Britain after about 200[24], but in the country a number of temples were being built or refurbished until almost the end of the fourth century.[25]

Other temples of simpler plan (single-celled and round, rectangular or polygonal) were also erected in the Roman period, and several of these had pre-Roman antecedents. In his study of Iron Age religion and ritual, Wait (1986:173, 183) was able to find considerable evidence of continuity of religious tradition into the Roman period: 60 per cent of all the Celtic religious sites he examined went on into the Roman period, and a number of temples (including several of Romano-Celtic plan) he believed had Iron Age predecessors.[26] To his examples a few others might be added, with temples built on the site of earlier sacred foci such as trees or groves, an artificial mound, or even a standing stone.[27]

Since water also played an important part in Celtic religion, it is likely that the temples at Carrawburgh and Springhead 2[28] were built over sacred springs. The building at Carrawburgh (Allason-Jones and McKay 1985) is unusual in that it began life as a Roman stone-lined cistern containing a natural spring. As the spring had had a religious significance the cistern came to be a place of veneration, and votives continued to be offered into the fifth century, long after the end of the Occupation. A similar situation may have arisen at Witham, where, during the early Roman period, an artificial pond was created in an area with a natural spring. This in turn became a sacred focus, with a Romano-Celtic

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temple built beside it in the late third/early fourth century (Turner 1982).

Few dedications for temples other than classical are known: examples include Apollo Cunomaglus from Nettleton (Wedlake 1982), Mercury/Mars/Silvanus from Uley (Woodward and Leach 1993)—where there may have been some doubt in the minds of the native British supplicants as to the identity of the god (see below, Chapter 6), Nodens at Lydney (Wheeler and Wheeler 1932; Casey 1981), and Coventina at Carrawburgh (Allason-Jones and McKay 1985). Further evidence from inscriptions on altars and metal plaques indicates the presence of many of the gods of the Roman pantheon, regularly paired with a Celtic deity by the votary.[29]

From the above, it can be seen that temples in Britain from the time of the Occupation reflected far more the continuity of native traditions than a wholesale conversion to the religions of the Romans; and even if a dedication was to a Roman deity, the chances are that this deity was viewed as such only by Romans or Romanised Britons. For the bulk of the population living in the country, the spirit of the place, whether named or unnamed, was still accorded veneration, and little had changed from the Iron Age.

This does not mean, of course, that the influence of the Romans did not penetrate British culture and customs at all. Such influence is reflected in changed burial rites and in approaches to religious art. If we can generalise, a late Iron Age burial involved interment into a rough grave in foetal or crouched position with head to the north, and with little grave furniture. With the coming of Rome this changed rapidly to supine and extended burial in properly cut graves, sometimes in a coffin, and part of a recognisable burial ground. More commonly, and certainly by the end of the first century, Romano-Britons, in line with Rome, adopted cremation as the main method of disposal of the dead. It was only by the third century that inhumation came once more to predominate.[30] Because of this, most of our cemetery evidence is from the late third and fourth century. It is clear, however, that while the methods of Roman burial were followed in Britain, the native practices were not totally abandoned. Indeed, in the fourth century, even with the advent of Christianity, burials in Roman Britain reflected a strong Celtic influence (Watts 1991:209–14). This point will be taken up later, in discussions on decapitated burial and syncretism (Chapters 4 and 6).

As with burials, Roman influence on religious art in Britain was apparent from an early period, with native sculptors taking the lead from the Romans and representing their deities in

anthropomorphicform to an increasing extent. The early indigenous attempts are clumsy and naive in comparison with their Roman models, but by the fourth century Romano-British art had reached a much higher (classical) standard, while retaining some of its Celtic heritage. The Mercury sculpture from Uley is one of the most significant works to illustrate this (Henig 1995:99, 111). That such a level of artistic achievement was lost as soon as the Roman influence disappeared from Britain suggests that it was not a natural Celtic preference to represent gods anthropomorphically.

Other pagan religions in Britain had representations of their deities, but these were cults brought in mainly by the soldiers of the Roman army, and such art would not be native British. Of the imported cults,[31] the most significant was Mithraism, but its significance was probably out of proportion to the number of its adherents because it was seen as a direct threat to Christianity. The threat must have been more perceived than real, since it was an exclusive cult, its membership comprising mainly soldiers and men engaged in trade. In Britain, dedications to the god are all by soldiers,[32] and mainly by officers. There is nothing to suggest that the cult held any attraction for native Britons, especially those living away from the cities and the forts.

Mithraea were found in London and several centres along the frontiers. They were built in the late second to early third century and most were desecrated or destroyed by the mid-fourth. The destruction of the Mithraea in Roman Britain is generally held by scholars to be the work of Christians.[33]

Further exotic religious imports to Britain included the cults of Jupiter Dolichenus, Isis, Cybele (Magna Mater) and Bacchus. The first two had associations with the army, but the appeal of Cybele and Bacchus seems to have been more widespread. Jupiter Dolichenus had a Hittite-Syrian origin and is known only from inscriptions from military areas.[34] Evidence for the cult of Isis, originating in Egypt, is equally rare and as yet found only in London.[35] The cult of the Great Mother, Cybele, on the other hand, is attested in Britain not only by inscriptions from Cavoran (*RIB* 1791 and 1792) but also by archaeological evidence from London, Dunstable and Verulamium. Bacchus, too, had a wider following and he may have been a relatively early import to Britain: Dionysius 'Periegetes', writing around the time of the Emperor Hadrian (AD 117–38), tells of islands near Jersey and Guernsey where the rites of Bacchus were performed.[36] While inscriptions to the god are not

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known from Britain, there are many representations of him and of the maenads and satyrs that accompany him. From a comprehensive study of his cult in Britain by Hutchinson (1986), it seems that although the evidence is widespread it occurs mainly in towns and on villa sites.

As well as being the god of wine, equating to the Greek Dionysus, Bacchus was also a saviour god. Resurrection or regeneration was a concept which his cult had in common with those of Mithras, Isis and Cybele. The appeal of these salvation cults seemed to grow, along with that of Christianity, with the uncertainties of the later empire. By the end of the fourth century, however, Christianity had by far the strongest position among them.

Christianity is likely to have come to Britain from Gaul: there was already a significant number of converts in that province by 177, when forty-eight were martyred at Lyon (Eusebius *H.E.* 5.1). There were 'many…of both sexes'—who were British martyrs, too, although Bede (*H.E.* 1.7) gives the names of only three: Alban, Aaron and Julius. He goes on to tell us (*H.E.* 1.8) that following the persecution of Diocletian 'faithful Christians… rebuilt the ruined churches'; but these 'churches' were more than likely house-churches, indistinguishable from other domestic buildings until the emergence of a distinctive church architecture. So Christianity remained archaeologically invisible in Britain until the Peace of the Church in 313. From that time on, buildings recognisable as churches were established, as well as cemeteries set aside for Christian use.

It is difficult to trace chronologically the growth of Christianity in Roman Britain, since dating evidence is very sparse, particularly for cemeteries. Nevertheless, a number of major sites have been published in the past few years since the present author's earlier research on the subject (Watts 1991). An attempt will thus be made here to put all available evidence together for the years up to the accession of Julian in 360; the further development of Christianity and the effects of his revival of paganism in Britain will be discussed later in this work. The evidence to be considered cannot include that which is not datable or provenanced. Many individual items, such as those appearing in Thomas (1981) and Mawer (1995), must therefore be excluded from this discussion. There will be heavy reliance on the identification of sites in the author's 1991 work.

Our earliest knowledge of the arrival of Christianity in Britain comes from Tertullian (*c.* 160–*c.* 240), who, writing around the beginning of the third century (*Adv. Iudaeos* 7), mentions

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