Framing the Early Middle Ages


Introduction

lack of development in interpretative paradigms in medieval scholarship to match developments in research

"the early middle ages, despite the fact that its scholarship (and even it evidence-base, thanks to archaeology) has been transformed more than those of most periods, has not seen a successful revision of its’ founding paradigms, and actually not even many unsuccessful ones."

"The early middle ages is a visceral period: it is the period when the polities first formed that are the genealogical ancestors of the nation states of today. The importance of these foundations continues to matter greatly to historians, whether consciously or unconsciously. All the sharpest debates about the period have always been about what are perceived as the major elements in national genealogies—the formation of unitary kingdoms in Denmark or England, their absence in Italy or Ireland, the reality and nature of the Arab break in Spanish or Palestinian history, the division on linguistic lines between France and Germany, and, all through every country of western Europe, the old issue of the exact role that ‘Germanic’ immigrants into the Roman empire had in the creation of those elements of national identity that are locally regarded as most significant.” these debates are country specific and not only matter little outside of the relevant country, but may also be poorly understood both in terms of logic as well as importance; in this vein, questions of Roman continuity are a pan-Europe question and allow researchers to get around regional specialties and problems

look at the different questions preoccupying researchers in each country

"Indeed, the Roman empire is too often seen as a whole, too seldom as a collection of provinces."

"It could be argued, however, that the basic problems derive from a failure to confront difference, whether temporal or spatial, in a comparative way: before versus after a major change like the replacement of the western Roman empire by a dozen successor states, or the loss by the eastern empire of most of its provinces to the Arabs; or the geographical differences between parallel regional experiences, of both continuity and change. Major generalizations have been made either simply by taking one region as normal, and analysing divergent patterns, if at all, as exceptions (Dopsch and Pirenne already did this), or simply by concentrating on one country, one series of nationally focused questions, and attempting to solve these alone. * NEED TO MAKE SURE AND PUT DATA IN A LARGER EUROPEAN CONTEXT

"the Carolingian period in Francia and Italy also coincides with a substantial increase in documentary evidence"

"Indeed, every narrative text for the late Roman and early medieval period has recently been (or soon will be) analysed as a piece of free-standing rhetoric, often separated entirely from anything except the textual traditions its author was operating inside, and presented as useless for understanding anything except the mind and the education of the author. This is certainly more satisfactory than the positivism of a generation ago (except, at least, when scholars do both at the same time, which they often do), but neglects the fact that authors did also write in a contemporary environment, and for a contemporary audience."

"More generally, what happened when the empire broke up into its various pieces was that each piece took the surviving elements of Roman social, economic, and political structures and developed them in its own way. * BAM

one issue with continuity is that it prescribes ownership of stylistic traits and thus removes the ability for people to learn appropriate and recreate in their own image

"even the most extreme situations of social change are also full of elements of continuity"

Geography and Politics

no one asks about the effect this migrations had on the moving populations

"The region of Gaul/Francia has by far the best narrative sources for anywhere in Europe and the Mediterranean in our period, ranging from Gregory of Tours (who is, together with Prokopios, by far our most detailed single author), through a constant stream of letter-collections, to six thick volumes of saints’ lives, nearly half of them contemporaneous or near-contemporary. When we add the richest set of documents after Egypt (more extensive than those of Italy, although rather less varied), it becomes clear that we can say more about the history of this region than about any other in the period up to 800"

"The continuities are not perfect: broadly, Aquitaine is best-documented in the fifth and sixth centuries"

archaeological research sporadic in its distribution: lots in Rhineland but with poor models; Mediterranean coast active past 2 decades but little documentation; Aquitaine has relatively little archaeological work at all; recent intensity in Normandy and Île de France to Picardy

"made more difficult by the divergencies between French and German scholarship. Wars between 1870 and 1945 hardly helped this, but the divergencies have continued since as well. Not surprisingly, the French have tended to Romanist positions and the Germans to Germanist ones; although this opposition has lessened sharply in recent years"

"German preference for histories of political power, aristocratic identity, and socio-legal categories and a French one for regional socio-economic and socio-political studies” certainly the very organization of archaeological information into departments, etc facilitates such regional approach and can hinder larger approaches
"The year 900 is a date which has also been seen as the beginning of three centuries of essor or croissance économique, a point of reference popular in French medieval historiography. For both of these reasons, there is less history written by French scholars about our period in this region than one"

ecological division between north and south (Med. region does not extend far inland) has been mirrored in political developments

In 400 "Aquitaine and the Rhône valley were prosperous centres of provincial Roman aristocratic society" further away from invasion borders (but Visigoths)

Broadly 3 main Germanic groups Visigoths (rogue Roman army), Franks (unconnected war-bands/tribes; least Romanized), and Burgundians (defeated remnant)

460s-480s areas of Roman autonomy continually squeezed by the expansion of these groups outside of their contained areas

"the Visigoths under Euric (466–84) controlled the whole of Aquitaine and Septimania (modern Languedoc) by 480, as well as Spain, and the Burgundians came to control the Rhône-Saône valley. In the north, the Frankish leader Clovis (481–511) removed the last traces of independent Roman power north of the Loire in the 480s, leaving only the far west, which had reorganized itself as an independent Celtic community, the Bretons; Clovis also unified the Frankish people under a single ruling family, the Merovingians"

"In 507 the Visigoths lost Aquitaine"

sixth c. saw the emergence of recently unified Franks as the most successful of these groups and gave northern Gaul a political centrality it had not had under the Romans

Clovis' death in 511 initiated a long tradition of divisible kingship that saw Francia consistently divided and redivided amongst male heirs up until the end of the ninth century--civil wars became a recurrent (stable?) factor of Merovingian history

613 Chlotar II united kingdom by force (son Dagobert I) but three main units continued as political intrigue and competition transferred to the role of the local palace official' Aquitaine occasionally had a sub-king but remained marginal due to the lack of the king's presence in the south

50 year period after Dagobert's death saw a shift in power from kings to mayors (widespread weakening of Frankish hegemony)

Charles Martel (illegitimate son of Pippin II) re-established gov. centrality in 719 but now in Austrasia; Merovingian kings became figure heads

Pippin III was Charles son and claimed throne in 751 establishing Carolingian dynasty--drew legitimacy from church sanction

"Carolingian political programmes were much more ecclesiastically influenced, indeed rather more systematic"

Charlemagne expanded political programs and extended rule to new territories--created a new Frankish political framework for western Europe "western Europeans were by the eleventh century simply called 'Franks' in the eastern Mediterranean"

"we can detect Frankish cultural influence in most elements of royal protagonism in the English-speaking lands between 600 and 1200—the Lowland Zone was in many ways a cultural colony of Gaul/Francia centuries before it became a political colony of one of Neustria's successor states in 1066."

The Form of the State

"Far too much political narrative of the early middle ages homogenizes political structures, making all kings pretty much the same...whether they ruled Francia in the sixth or in the tenth century"

seems to be a lack of institutionalization of the political process in the early middle ages

"What happened in the fifth (and sixth) century in the West was that the balance between money and land shifted: from an army that was basically paid (though given land when necessary) to an army that was basically landed (though supplied when necessary or useful: on campaign, in garrisons, or as one-off royal largesse)—much less abrupt a shift, though a crucially significant one nonetheless."

"Actually, one can (p.61) distinguish between three main meanings of the word in historical practice: feudalism as a mode of production; feudal society as the 'politics of land', characteristic of the land-based rather than the tax-based polities just discussed; and what is sometimes called 'military feudalism', or 'feudo-vassalic' relationships, characterized by a system of rewards based on conditional military tenures (fiefs) and complex rules of loyalty." 7

"It is not easy to collect tax in an agrarian society. It is not, actually, that easy to collect rent either, as subsistence peasants are understandably unwilling or resentful payers of their own surplus to outside powers in any society. But at least landowners tend to know who holds land from them, and their structural opponents are the peasants themselves, who rarely have much of the main force or the desire for risk that are necessary if they want to defy the aristocracy" why did feudalism work--here might be one answer

" This is by now not a controversial position: the majority of scholars would argue that the period around 400 was one of institutional stability and also economic prosperity; the late empire was a period of violence, injustice, and brutal exploitation, but these were standard features of ancient (indeed, most) societies, and can, as noted earlier, easily coexist with stability. how do we SEE stability or instability? How can we define it?

"The problem comes in determining how institutional change actually did take place, if it was not during the tornado of fifth-century events: for, most certainly, by 800 (say), none of the political structures of the West any longer resembled those of the Roman world"

"But these were also the heartlands of the Merovingian Frankish kingdom, after the reunification of nearly the whole of Gaul under Clovis and his sons. The ex-Visigothic and ex-Burgundian provinces of the south, which had a less complex experience of conquest, show far more evidence of
Roman traditions, in culture, aristocratic landowning, and political/ecclesiastical institutions; indeed, after the Visigoths left Aquitaine in the early sixth century, in that sector of Gaul there were few non-Romans at all. The Franks saw the south, except the northern parts of the Burgundian kingdom (roughly modern Burgundy), as ‘Roman’ territory, as can be seen for example in the Vita Eligii, a seventh-century life rewritten in the Carolingian period, which shows Eligius (d. 660) coming from Limoges north to ‘the soil of the Franks’, and, when bishop of Noyon, being reviled by (supposedly) paganizing Franks as a romanus. The Merovingians were based above all in the Paris-Oise basin and eastwards to the Cologne–Trier–Metz area of the Rhine, Moselle, and Meuse valleys.

"The Merovingians kept kingship strictly inside the family"

"It is generally reckoned that the Merovingian kings were strong rulers until at least the death of Dagobert I, in 639. They were immensely rich, suffered few checks on their activities, and were happy to kill any of their entourage of ambitious aristocrats with only sporadic criticism in contemporary narrative sources, Gregory of Tours, ‘Fredegar’, and an array of saints lives. Royal minorities did sometimes lead to the weakening of one of the Merovingian courts, but these periods were reversed when the kings concerned reached adulthood."

some recent scholarship has engaged in revisionist history and purported later Merovingian kings as effective rulers but Wickham disagrees with this because of the power of mayors in choosing their own kings

6th c.=taxation of Roman (not Frankish) population but taxation increasingly unpopular

7th c.=taxation seen as an abuse of power; royal lands became currency of political ambitions

because army was landed and civil admin was sketchy 6th c. Merovingians could amass large amounts of wealth through taxes and thus use them as gifts to control aristocracy; however, freedom from tax could also be a gift and was especially bestowed on ever increasing church lands; thus although taxation may have weakened, the amounts of LAND held by political power helped support public authority

"But the basis of the state changed very substantially as a result. And, even if the Merovingians were not destroyed by the centrifugal tendencies of the politics of land, the Carolingians would be, in the century after the end of the political unity and military success of the years 720–830."

understanding of taxation in 6th century comes from Gregory of Tours and while it is unlikely his region would have been the only ones taxed it may

"It may be that the weakness of the tax structure in the same areas simply derives from the end of the Rhine army and the cessation of tax-collection (or its rapid privatization by landowners) in the Rhine-supply catchment area, which did not involve western Gaul/Aquitaine as much as it did the north, and not from any wider disruption there. This is wholly speculative, of course."

"The Merovingian Franks are in some ways the hardest to characterize, because their aristocracies were so unruly and powerful, and their political expedients were so ad hoc."

"The Merovingians appear to have seen it as their main task to ratify and to legitimate, not to change, the behaviour of others: a self-restriction of royal responsibility "

Aristocracies

"In late Antiquity and the early middle ages, the situation was certainly far more fluid. In our period, indeed, there was no single word for ‘aristocrat’ in most of our societies, and we must recognize that the concept is ours, not theirs."

"The best-documented aristocracies of the post-Roman world are in Gaul and Italy,"

Gaul already separated in some senses by the 3rd century (formed independent empire 260-274), thus 4th c. integration UNUSUAL whereas fifth century regionalism more normal; political separation reinforced by economic separation

"Political break-up did not, however, just mean a separation between Gaul and Italy. Gaul in the late fifth century was made up of several fully independent polities"

"The Frankish conquest of the south, in the years 507–33, did not reunify southern society, which tended to remain divided between a Loire-Garonne network—Aquitaine—and a Saône-Rhône network—Burgundy and Provence. Indeed the Frankish north would in the seventh century slowly split into two as well, "

"We can legitimately see Aquitaine, at least—doubtless the Rhône basin was similar—as the focus for a large-scale aristocratic network, partially autonomous of Frankish patronage, that linked the Loire, the Garonne, and the western valleys of the Massif Central, lasting at least to the end of the sixth century, and probably, as the Aviti indicate, to the end of the seventh."

"e do have a good number of rich late villas, nonetheless, some with identifiable sixth- (occasionally even seventh-) century finds surviving from excavations that were often fairly sketchy:""

"The military world was, very much, a king-centred world, for kings were the direct sources of all political patronage, as well as of the lavish gifts that characterized Merovingian political practice."

many documents ecclesiastical not even necessarily an insight into aristocratic lives

"The north of Gaul became militarized earlier (towards 400 rather than towards 500), and also more Germanized; unlike the south, it went over to Frankish names (one of the last people to be called romanus in the north was Chramnelen, a dux from the Besançon area, (p.177) in 636), and then to generalized Frankish ethnicity. But the difference is essentially sub-regional. Gregory of Tours is famous for not distinguishing Franks and Romans in his histories; he saw ethnicity as, if anything, conveyed by political loyalties, not birth, and senatorial status, not Roman origin, was what mattered to him. By 700 the Romani are simply the inhabitants of Aquitaine, who did not at that moment always recognize Frankish
suzerainty; in effect, everyone else was a Frank. On the other hand, this does not imply an unchanging social world in the south. Michel Rouche has argued that Aquitaine remained sharply distinct from the Frankish north, as Roman in culture and tradition.

**written documentation paints the world of Aquitaine as a distinct sub-region--politically and culturally from the rest of the Frankish kingdom**

"northern church-owning in Aquitaine, we have a substantial documentation for Neustrians owning south of the Loire, with not much sign of Aquitainians owning in the north. It would be hard to disagree with Rouche when he stresses the exploitation which this involved; the Aquitainian aristocracy were beginning to face rivals from the north. 93 But, more important, it shows how widely dispersed both secular and ecclesiastical landowning could be in seventh-century Francia, at least its western half."

"Both in Aquitaine and in the north, however, we are entitled to conclude that the geographical scale of the economy as a whole could sustain—and would have been supported by—landowning that could often span two or three hundred kilometres, and sometimes more. The monasteries they founded inherited these large spans of property too, and indeed organized them in economic terms increasingly systematically between the seventh century and the ninth. 99 This brings us back to the issue of archaeologically attested exchange networks, which will be discussed further in Chapter 11, but which, as already noted, were unusually wide-ranging in Merovingian Francia"

long-distance landowning documented almost always N-S, not E-W

changes in aristocratic culture

ancestry--mattered much to late Roman, during 6th c. may have mattered more in Aquitaine (do not know about northern 6th c. aristocrats); 7th c. stresses ancestry in both N. and S.

landed wealth--most stable; from 4th-8th find wealthy social stratum; Carolingian period saw considerable continuity from Merovingian in land owning patterns

personal link with rulers--little change from emperors to kings; centered around collective dining

importance of court--low in Roman; high for Merovingian even as arena of legitimate royal behavior--shrunk

"Unfortunately, our evidence for Aquitaine becomes much less generous after the seventh century, so we cannot track north–south parallelisms side by side; still less can we tell if the military reconquest of Aquitaine in the 760s brought structural discontinuities in that sub-region"

**the story of early medieval Francia/Gaul is written from a series of texts that are nonuniformerly scattered across the modern day country--this is despite the fact that we know that these areas were very different**

"And yet, notwithstanding the end of villa culture, it should be clear from the preceding pages that in Gaul/Francia, at any rate, aristocratic wealth remained enormous."

" would argue that the end of the villa system is best seen as a marker, with a different date in each region, of the militarization of aristocratic lifestyles, rather than of crisis."

"The fate of the aristocracy is better documented in Gaul/Francia than anywhere else in the former empire, in part precisely because it continued to be so rich and influential, in part because of the wealth of our local narratives. It has also been, for nearly two centuries, the focus for an unusually large amount of attention by historians."

**general trends in aristocracies from empire to post-Roman period**

1. post-Roman poorer (except Francia and Syria)
2. aristocracies more localized (except Francia)
3. change in aristocratic identities (except S. Francia and Spain)
4. political decentralization led to end of sub-regional elites
5. tendency to militarization of identity and values

southern Gaul and Spain unusual because post-Roman aristocrats seemed to have operated inside a "broadly defined socio-political habitus"

**Managing the Land**

"the late Roman and post-Roman world was, of course, overwhelmingly an agrarian society; artisanal work was only a small proportion of the total productive activity of any of our regions"

"s is well known, a concern for recording estate structures was promoted by the Carolingian court, and we would expect such recording to be most systematically practised on royal estates. But the Capitulare de villis is normative, not descriptive; and the estate surveys we have for the ninth century are lists of tenants, holdings, and standard rents, not registers of whether and when such rents were actually paid."

Traditional interpretation (up to 1960s) of Francia estates was that they were run through manorial system with demesnes cultivated by tenants overturned and origin of manor much later in 8th century

many estates run by tenants without demenses at all before 8th century
“Francia in the early middle ages was never a region where exchange collapsed, as we shall see in Chapter 11 (pp. 794–805), but that exchange hardly matched the late Roman Mediterranean in its overall intensity.”

“The régime domanial classique in Francia was overwhelmingly a northern phenomenon, at least in the Carolingian period. It is almost invisible in the estate records we have for the Auvergne, the Saône valley, and for anywhere south of that.”

“these unevenesses of development led to what Ludolf Kuchenbuch has called Rentenlandschaften: different areas, all across ninth-century Francia, which had different patterns of rents and services, largely irrespective of which great lords owned in each, as the geographical contrasts inside polyptychs show.”

“The key point that comes out of a recognition of these differences is, however, that the same sort of pressure from above could produce locally distinct socio-economic realities, depending on what was there before. Carolingian manorialization, even when it occurred, was not a fully homogenizing process. And that pressure did not have even to result in manorialization, as it did not in southern Francia; as the Romans knew, one could derive sufficient profit from simple tenure, if rents were high enough.”

**Political breakdown and state-building in the North**

“One parameter that I have not much discussed here is market relations. Twenty years ago Richard Hodges put them at the centre of his innovative analyses of state-formation in Francia and the northern lands, going so far as to argue that Charlemagne consciously developed the market to buttress the state in Francia. Neither the market nor the state really needed much buttressing in Francia in 800, however, even setting aside the issue of whether this form of economic consciousness existed in our period.”

**Peasants and local societies: case studies**

“First, our snapshots of local societies have tended to show relatively stable social structures. Some elements of potential future change have been visible, but these were not societies obviously facing social breakdown or transformation. In part, a static image is privileged by the sort of analysis presented here, for one needs to treat a body of material as a single unit. . . . But I would anyway wish to argue that social change at the peasant level was often pretty slow.”

“a crucial parameter for how peasant society works is the fragmentation of large landowning, more even than the latter’s simple extent: the more fragmented that landowning is, the more space there is for peasant social action.”

**Rural settlement and village societies**

“Overall, the areas of this survey that are most hypothetical, most subject to reinterpretation in the light of future research, lie in the post-Roman western Mediterranean: in those regions, research methodologies capable of identifying rural settlement in the early middle ages at all have only been generated relatively recently, in the last two decades in Italy, the last decade or little more in southern France and eastern Spain.”

“first, there is a real difference between the eastern Roman empire and the western in the importance of villages in the rural landscape, which has stood up to all attempts at critique that I have seen; as a result, I shall look at the villages of the East first, as a separate topic from the more dispersed rural settlement of the Roman West. Second, around the period of the end of the Roman empire in the West, one particularly characteristic settlement form, the rural villa, went out of use, and was replaced by a wider range of patterns;”

“There are two general features of western Roman settlement patterns that need to be stressed here. The first is that there was a network of many thousands of rural aristocratic residences and other estate-centres, ‘villas’, extending from around York to around Lepcis Magna; the second is that this network coexisted with, and indeed structured, a rural settlement hierarchy which tended to be dispersed in most of the western Roman empire”

rural villas not all the same

villas foci of western Roman settlement but they were more highly dispersed

“a network of medium-sized villas, smaller ones, and isolated farmsteads that predominated in most places in the Roman period, with other forms of concentrated settlement generally rarer”

several types of village: large, nodal commercial settlements (agglomérations secondaires); vici (smaller, rural pop. by mall peasant owners)

“The other aspect of the centrality of villas is the terminology of territorial identity in the Roman West. Country-dwellers live today in village territories, named from and focused on settlements. These settlements can be concentrated or dispersed, but the sense of being part of a single village does not entirely depend on living close together, and can be present even if everyone lives in scattered farms. This geographical territorialization, with a common identity being shared by everyone living in that territory no matter what their tenurial status, is at the core of what the word ‘village’ means in this book (see further below, p. 516). Such village territories are distinct from each other, and are normally unitary blocks. This pattern was normal in the eastern Mediterranean from the start of our period, as we have seen; the boundaries of village territories mattered, and could be fought over. In the West, however, at least while the Roman empire lasted, we cannot see such village territories in the majority of our texts. Instead, geographical locations were for the most part named fundi: units of ownership, sometimes linked together in massae.”

contrast between focus on villa in West and village in East

--weakness of western peasant communities

--rural aristocratic display more necessary in west and thus impressive (villas marker of elite cultural values)

--east and west BOTH prosperous despite different settlement patterns; concentration may allow greater specialization; but not necessarily a causation of specialization
settlement pattern differences may reflect denial of aristocratic control over the countryside

"Actually, aristocrats can, if they are strong enough, dominate either a concentrated or a dispersed landscape with ease; conversely, peasant autonomy can be expressed through both settlement types too. In specific periods, particular aspects of control or autonomy may perhaps favour one or the other (the sharply territorialized local seigneurial control of the eleventh century often genuinely favoured agglomerations, for example— I have argued the point elsewhere myself), but that is as much as can safely be said. Settlement patterns do not in themselves stably define or reflect particular economic relationships. This could be important to explore in the results section"

"All the same, a combination of dispersed peasant settlement and estate-based identity hardly could be said to help peasant collective coherence. A world of villages would be a significant social change, when it came, however great any continuities of settlement were."

villa domination in the west at 300 had disappeared by 700 and the patterns were various

--some abandoned
--transformed into estate-centres (real organizational continuity)
--replaced by churches or monasteries (real organizational continuity)
--some reused in various ways
--replaced by occupation nearby
--some continue to be occupied but change into geographically defined settlement—i.e. villages

"It is often the case that we can only deduce this from placenames (modern villages, unexcavated, whose names end in -ano or -aco or -ate in Italy, -an and -ac in southern France, -i in northern France, representing old tenurial names such as the fundus Cornelianus or Corneliacus)."

"historians and archaeologists are sometimes too optimistic when they presume villa-to-village continuities without excavation."

"In Aquitaine, too, we can at least identify a few villas which continued into the seventh century without abandoning their basic organizational structures, though not, probably, beyond that."

"In northern Gaul, between the Seine and the Rhine, it is clear, above all thanks to recent empirical overviews and syntheses by Paul Van Ossel and Pierre Ouzoulias, that villas began most consistently to lose their old identities in the late fourth century, probably slightly earlier even than Britain... This dating is a significant one, for the fourth century was for the most part a period of peace and stability in Gaul, with the capital of the western empire for a time located at Trier. And, indeed, the end of villas does not seem to reflect economic or political weakness;"

"In this sense, all the same, one could say that north Gaulish villas were already evolving towards early medieval villages in the last century of Roman rule. The Franks settled, from the middle decades of the fifth century onwards, in a landscape that was already mostly ‘de-Romanized’ in its material culture."

"C. R. Whittaker has argued strongly that the fourth century is a period in which the frontiers of the Roman empire functioned more as zones of interaction than as physical boundaries, and that the militarization of social and political action was a general feature of northern Gaul, well before the (p.477) invasion period. This is a convincing and important argument; it helps to explain many of the continuities between the Roman and the post-Roman world."

"The first model is very late villa survival. Aquitaine is not well studied archaeologically, but work on some of the largest villas shows that a few were still occupied, and sometimes refurbished, into the seventh century (above, p. 174). This area of cultural and economic survival may have extended quite far north, for a villa with late fifth-century mosaics and seventh-century architectural ornament has been found at Marboué (Eure-et-Loir), only some 100 km south of Paris. It was proposed in Chapter 4 that in Aquitaine this late use of villas fits with a surviving Roman aristocracy, which maintained many of its traditional practices rather longer than elsewhere."

"In both Aquitaine and Spain, secular civilian traditions were steadily replaced, as elsewhere in the West, with aristocrats having to choose between a militarized secular hierarchy or the church; but both maintained an urban focus,"

"These patterns probably show that cultural change was rather more moderate there than in northern Gaul; richer villa owners, maybe still city-dwelling, could well have simply given up rural otium patterns and transferred their estate-management to smaller complexes, perhaps in villages, with lesser villa owners moving to the villages as well."

"What these models of villa breakdown already show is the microregionality of local settlement change once the homogeneity of Roman culture and economy could no longer be assured; even though villas in a given region generally went out of use in the same period, what replaced them was very much more diverse, depending on local socio-economic structures and agricultural practices."

"The settlements discussed in this section fall into the relatively unstructured period between the villa network and the castle network. They are difficult to seize as a whole, for no easily visible framing device can be used to characterize them; they are hard to find, in the absence of well-studied ceramics and impressive ruins; the area studies that we can use to identify (p.495) them are still relatively few, and often ambiguous. Caught between but they don’t know this; castle networks are not yet the outcome for these groups"
the major cultural shift in N. Gaul happened a century before the Germanic invasions

"North French excavation has largely been small-scale, in the context of rescue work; the main archaeological strength of the sub-region for our period is actually in field survey, which we shall come to in a moment. As already noted, whole villages have rarely been excavated, unlike in the northern European countries—* France as a whole lacks from detailed, non-rescue excavation of these sites in modern time *

"The field surveys and rescue excavations that have been carried out in recent years, on the other hand, largely in the framework of major stripping work, for autoroutes, TGV tracks, airports, or Disneyland Paris, which has in France been done sufficiently recently that the skills necessary for the recognition of early medieval ceramics were by then in place"

"This sort of relative settlement continuity, with some possible agricultural retreat at the margins, showing signs of a population decline since the Roman period but not a demographic collapse, is beginning to be a common feature of the evidence for the post-Roman western empire. "

"This relative informality of western villages is at least in part because, in the former Roman empire, they were new as a way of organizing the landscape—before the end of villas, they were secondary to estate organization, where they existed at all. I have argued that the end of villas was a cultural more than an economic or political change, related to the changing nature of aristocracies, but it had a profound effect on peasant society: it invented the village for them."

"How peasant settlement related spatially to the places where aristocrats did live is thus important if we wish to understand how the two classes related in other ways. But a structured hierarchy of habitat did not necessarily denote domination over a peasantry"

Peasant society and its problems

peasants saw less change across the period than did aristocracies

"One consequence of this was that the end of the empire, even in the West, was not, for the most part, a process which peasantries would have experienced as immediate, catastrophic, change. It did not result in either liberation or subjugation, at least in the short term. But it was a very substantial change, for all that, when seen structurally: the fifth and sixth centuries, in the West at least, showed a systemic shift for peasant society, which we can associate with the end of the empire"

major debate over whether 4th c. colonate laws represented institutionalization of social position or if it ONLY outlined the taxes paid and not the subordinate status

"Actually, the 440s was not a decade of crisis, at least in Gaul: Salvian, like Libanios, was inveighing against a situation of stable corruption, not fiscal breakdown—even for Salvian, the taxes were still being paid, and they continued to be for some time yet"

“the tax system did indeed slowly break up in the West. By the seventh century it had become marginal (in Gaul and Spain…This took a heavy weight off peasantries throughout the West, and, as already argued, lessened the legal constraints and simplified the patronage system they lived inside. The combined result of these changes was radical, even if it was slow, and perhaps often imperceptible to peasants themselves”

“in Gaul and Spain it took 150 years or more, across the period c.450–650; …By the end, the state had substantially retreated as a mediating force (except for the occasional impact of army muster, or of the judicial ceremonial of the placitum), and western peasants were left to face landowners directly."

The fact that they could deal with landowners directly may have had an effect on spatial organization but also the fact that Gaulish aristocrats did not become poorer

Charateristics of peasant economies

1. surplus difficult to acquire since little extra handed out in systems of reciprocity
2. external, commercial markets exist but are marginal
3. don’t work as hard since surplus not stressed
4. relatively egalitarian

How would this look?

1. lack of economic differntiation
2. lack of artisanal scale and complexity
3. relatively restricted population levels
4. perhaps simple agrarian technologies

"Above all, however, the rough 50 per cent decline for sites, that can be traced in parts of both northern Gaul and eastern England, represents relatively firm data of a kind that cannot easily be matched elsewhere (above, pp. 312, 507). The trouble is that this decline, whatever its cause, cannot be ascribed to plague, for it began in the fifth century, not the sixth, and the later sixth century shows if anything the beginning of the stabilization of our archaeological evidence in those sub-regions, the basis for future slow demographic rises from, maybe, the seventh century onwards"

sixth century plague = marginal event
“The other significant aspect of the western demographic decline is that it was for the most part internal to areas of continuous agriculture, which only retreated slightly: with the end of the occupation of some poorer lands, particularly in mountain areas, and, in general, the shift of settlement into river valleys, and out of plateaux between them. This does not necessarily mean that the poorer lands were no longer used, but they were probably often used for more extensive forms of agriculture, long-fallow cultivation and rough grazing. In richer lands, there are very few areas of major agricultural abandonment, as pollen analyses are beginning to show. (For all this, see above, Chapter 8.) The same is implied by the regular survival of Roman microtoponyms across wide areas of France or Italy;”

“We have seen in Chapter 8 that village coherence, and thus the opportunities for local power, varied very greatly. In the East, villages were structured communities, with official leaderships....many western village communities had no visible leaders at all. Village coherence was particularly weak in the western Mediterranean”

“By 1000, and often much earlier, the peasant mode was only vestigial in Francia”

“the Carolingian period was, in general, indeed a crucial period of aristocratic affirmation, in almost every part of the empire of Charlemagne.”

“This is an arena, all the same, in which we must proceed very carefully, without overgeneralization. For the third trap is simply put: it is to forget that the real shifts between a peasant and an aristocratic economic logic were not regional at all, but microregional. But if we recognize that, and keep our focus on the (few) local areas for which we can say something securely, then we may be able to move from negative to positive arguments. In northern Francia, we have evidence for some microregions which is occasionally detailed enough to allow us to speculate about such shifts, and they show no such uniformity of dating. I”

evidence for why would should be studying at the microregional scale

Cities

“More generally, in every region of the former empire, the definition of ‘cityness’ changed considerably from its Roman origins; the ideological pull that cities had for aristocracies shifted accordingly”

“The move towards the dominance of informal city notables could thus, as we shall see in more detail later, be represented by the destructuring of the old city centre”

“The second point follows on from this: the informality of urban elites coexisted everywhere with two strong and continuous formal hierarchies, those of central government and of the church.”

“In Merovingian Francia we find the opposite, a well-documented aristocracy firmly embedded in the countryside. Again, the basic patterns were set out in Chapter 4, and only need summarizing here. The strongest signs of active urban societies after 550 or so were in the south, centres like Poitiers, Clermont, Limoges, Bordeaux, and Marseille, and in most of these we have some evidence of local urban aristocracies, focusing on episcopal office. All the same, even in the south, not all leading figures had urban origins or a clear urban base.”

Based on documented aristocratic bases, we can hypothesize the importance of urbanism in different regions: in southern Gaul second most urbanized aristocrats

“Knowing where to expect post-Roman aristocratic residences will also help us when we are assessing archaeological work, since so few of such residences have actually been found by archaeologists.”

“which means that the behaviour of urban elites has to be deduced from the archaeology alone, rather than contextualized and/or explained by narrative representations,”

major issue in the interpretation of the medieval period even within this book

north of Loire urbanism different, however view for southern urbanism of Gaul based largely on Lyon and Ales

decrease in importance of the forum which coincides with decrease in political/economic importance of curiae
cathedral and secular centers less often linked and sometimes in spatial competition

aristocrats in Gaul rich, but less committed to urban living even in the south

"seem to me legitimate to see the eighth century as clearly urbanistically weaker than the fourth in the western Mediterranean"

northern Gaul sees a homogenous development of urbanism

"The Tours of Gregory of Tours's writings was a bustling place, with numerous churches, including the large extramural burial complex of St-Martin, which was one of Gaul's major pilgrimage sites. The 6th century was certainly save enough for people to feel free to move around and make pilgrimages and to expend time and energy on events beyond "sustainability."

"Frankish sources talk systematically in terms of civitates, which were the building blocks for Merovingian government as much as they were for the Visigoths or the Lombards. But with the example of Tours in mind, one might legitimately wonder whether any of the other towns of the north had more material corporality."

many Merovingian northern towns città ad isole—polynuclear settlements

processions linked scattered settlement areas together

"The fact that the Frankish emporia did not become political foci also meant that they could not easily develop their own territorial hinterlands, and this, added to their boundary position, made them less stable in the long run; all the Frankish emporia were abandoned by 900."

"The typical city in our period, in 800 as much as 400, and indeed up to the Industrial Revolution, was a focus for the surplus from local landowning, local aristocratic demand, local production, local markets for country-dwellers, and local political/administrative organization. Its prosperity changed at a far slower pace than that of Marseille or Dorestad or Venice."

Systems of Exchange

Exchange can either be commercial (desire for profit) or non-commercial (reciprocity or redistribution)

"We are attuned to seeing economic complexity in teleological, even moral, terms: if an economy gets simpler, it is less 'developed', or 'declines'; if it becomes more complex it 'improves', and society is 'richer'."

"Southern Gaul is midway between these two Spanish sub-regions in its patterns. It was not cut off from the Mediterranean, even in Aquitaine, but it shared some of the features of the Spanish interior too."

"The sixth century thus saw a fragmentation of distribution patterns, again paralleling Spain."

hard to track southern Gaul ceramics from 7th century

"As the CATHMA ceramic group note in their publications, this implies a rather less localized early middle ages than is sometimes assumed. Aquitaine's common and coarse wares are far less studied, but a parallel to the kaolinitiques seems to be 'E ware', a seventh-century coarse type made, as it seems, on a substantial scale, probably in Poitou, and exported as far as Britain and Ireland."
“Let us finally turn to southern Gaul. Here, there is another disjuncture to be faced. In earlier chapters it has become clear that this was, in the sixth to eighth centuries, a sub-region of rich aristocracies, with widely spaced lands, particularly in Aquitaine less urbanized but still maintained Roman lifestyles.

“Until the Carolingian conquest of the south in the eighth century, they were little affected by political upheaval. The picture of their exchange structures that has here been set out is partially different from this: we have seen ceramic localization and simplification from the sixth century, with only coarse and common wares, the *kaolinitique* exchange system of Languedoc and the Rhône valley, and ‘E ware’ in Poitou, operating over wide areas. But we should not be misled by the unambitiousness of these ceramic types: they do show demand structures of some complexity.”

northern Gaul

“There was certainly a network of markets across the Merovingian lands, which are regarded as normal in literary texts, as casual references show. These seem to have been hierarchically arranged.”

“The Carolingian upturn in aristocratic wealth and political domination on the one hand and in exchange on the other is undeniable; both are products of the stable patterns of political power across the four generations 720–830. The period was one in which very many rich people and ecclesiastical institutions could be found in northern Francia, and therefore one in which substantial quantities of goods were made or distributed to satisfy their needs.”

**General Conclusions**

1. fiscal structures nearly universally simpler
2. period of relative aristocratic weakness
   a. peasantries more autonomous
   b. aristocracies changed in their culture and identity
3. more regional divergence
4. end of Roman imperial unity set off these trends