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Brest: *castellum*. Brick courses in postern gate (detail)

Photograph R. Sanquer



XVI  
Le Coz-Yaudet, Ploulec'h (Côtes-du-Nord): seaward gate of Roman defences (excavation L. Fleuriot, conservation Y. Garlan, photograph Y. Garlan)

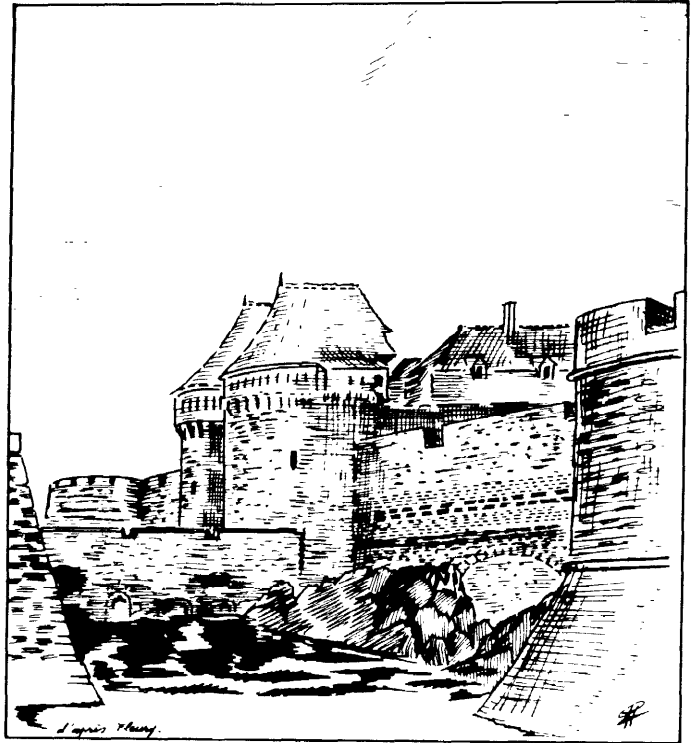


Fig 18 Brest: facade of the *castellum*, after an engraving by E Fleury. Note the relieving arch, which seems to be ancient, and the brick courses. The drawing is not completely accurate, since the brick courses are not shown interrupted by the removal of the Roman towers, which is the case in fact

the last quarter of the 3rd century and the first quarter of the 4th, in association with the Saxon Shore and the *tractus Armoricanus et Nervicanus*.

The name of the fortification will doubtless never be known. However, one theory is rather attractive. The *Notitia Dignitatum* locates a garrison of Mauri Ossismiaci at Ossismis. Logically this name, taken from that of the *civitas* of the early Empire, should be attributed to Carhaix-Vorgium. However, Carhaix was not fortified in the Late Empire and, moreover, it lies nearly 100 km from the sea. On the other hand, an ancient tradition, repeated in the life of St Gouesnou of the 11th century (Sterck and Leduc 1971), identifies Brest, at that time known as *civitas Legionum*, as the capital of the Ossismii, which would have given its name to the whole surrounding region, Léon. Might this not be an indication of the transfer of the capital from Carhaix to Brest, similar to that from Corseul to Alët at the same time and for the same reasons?

It is likely that Brest retained its Roman garrison until the beginning of the 5th century. The departure of the garrison no doubt coincided with the revolt of 409, in the course of which, according to Zosimus, 'Armorica and other Gaulish provinces liberated themselves, expelled the Roman officials, and established a government of their own'. Even if Roman control was restored by 416, there was a gap of several years. Was the see of the bishopric transferred from Brest to Saint-Pol de Léon at this time? Was the origin of the Abbey of Saint-Mathieu linked with the history of Brest? These are difficult questions, which we are ill-equipped to answer.

#### *The Brest castellum in its context*

It is probably useful for a readership unfamiliar with the historical geography of Brittany to locate the castle at Brest in the context of the administrative boundaries of the Roman Empire.

The territory of modern Brittany was occupied in the Gaulish period by five *civitates*: the Namnetes, the Riedones, the Coriosolitae, the Veneti, and the Ossismii. The Roman Empire fixed them within frontiers which in certain cases are still respected today. Of these five tribes, three—the Veneti, Riedones, and Namnetes—followed what might be considered a normal development pattern.

The *civitas* of the Namnetes was the origin of the ecclesiastical diocese of Nantes and later the modern *département* of Loire-Atlantique, without any major divergencies. Even its cantonal capital, Nantes, known as Condevicium in the early Empire, became *civitas Namnetum* in the 3rd century, was destroyed in the 270s, was walled in the last quarter of the 3rd century and, according to the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Occ. CCCVII, 7) the *Praefectus militum superventorum* commanded a garrison there in the 4th century.

The case was similar in the canton of the Riedones. The *département* of Ille-et-Vilaine, successor to the diocese of Rennes, has boundaries not greatly dissimilar from those of the Roman *civitas*. Its capital, Condate, became *civitas Riedonum* in the 3rd century, was destroyed in the 270s, was walled in the last quarter of the 4th century, and a *Praefectus* commanded a unit of Frankish *laeti* there in the 4th century (Notitia Oct. XLII, 36). A similar development occurred with the Veneti. The few variations between the boundaries of the modern *département* of Morbihan, the diocese of Vannes, and the Roman *civitas* are attributable only to accidents of history. The capital, Darioritum, according to the Peutinger Table, became *civitas Venetorum* in the 3rd century, was destroyed in the 270s, was walled, and in the 4th century a *Praefectus militum Maurorum Benetorum* was stationed at Benetis (Vannes).

It can thus be seen that the development of these three *civitates* was parallel, without any anomalies. However, the same cannot be said of the other two, those of the Coriosolitae and the Ossismii.

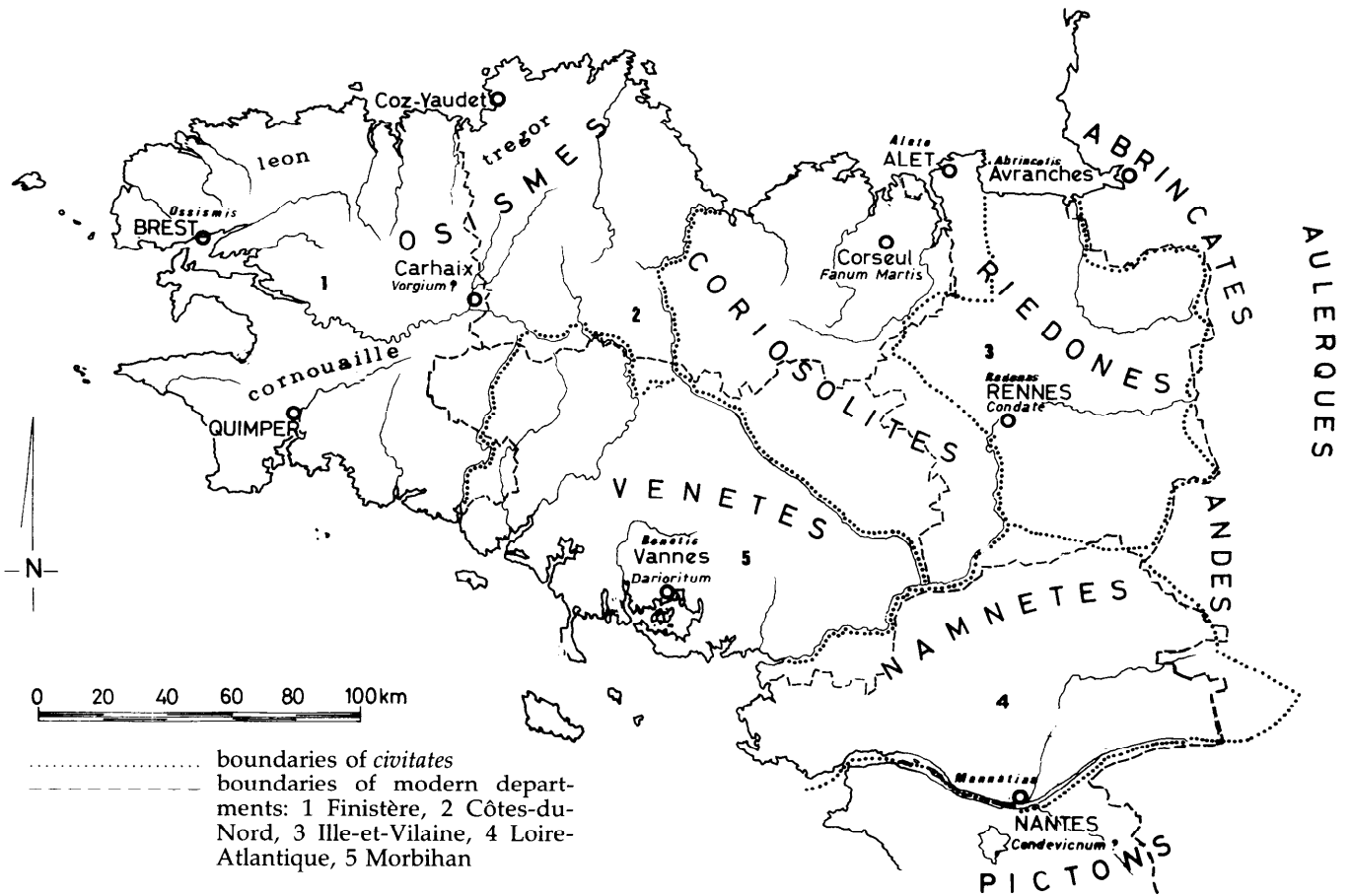


Fig 19 Roman cities in western Armorica. Sources: Pape 1969, 93, and Riche 1969, 129

So far as the Coriosolitae are concerned, there is no longer any relationship between the ancient *territorium* and the present-day *département* of Côtes-du-Nord. Since the introduction of Christianity, this *civitas* has been divided between the dioceses of Alet, Saint-Brieuc, and Vannes. The capital, *Fanum Martis*(?) in the Early Empire took the name *Civitas Coriosolitam* in the 3rd century and was destroyed in the 270s, but it was not walled nor did it receive a garrison in the 4th century. It would appear to have been proved (see above p 45) that the capital was transferred from Corseul to Alet during the 4th century, since the *Praefectus militum Martensium* was located at Alet (*Notitia Oct. XXXVII, 19*) and a late Empire defensive wall is to be seen there.

The situation was similar for the Ossismii. The vast *territorium* of this *civitas* formed three Christian dioceses—Léon, Trégor, and Cornouaille—and the modern *département* of Finistère yields the whole of the north-eastern portion of the *civitas* to Côtes-du-Nord. The same proof is not available that the early Empire capital, Vorgium (Carhaix), ever took the name *civitas Ossismiorum*. It was destroyed in the 270s, but was never walled. Is it therefore logically possible to locate the *Praefectus militum Maurorum Osismiarorum* (*Notitia Oct. XXXVII, 17*) at Vorgium? Without answering this question directly, I would point out that the remains of late Empire fortifications occur in two of the three dioceses that make up the *territorium* of the Ossismii—at Brest, the subject of this paper, and at Coz-Yaudet-en-Ploulec'h (Côtes-du-Nord).

Both sites, like Alet, are located on the coast and both at one time bore the appellation *civitas*. Etymologically, Coz-

Yaudet derives directly from *Vetus Civitatem* and Brest is known in early documents, such as the Life of St Goueznou, as *Civitas Legionum*. Both, like Alet, gave rise to bishoprics, since Brest is assumed to have preceded Saint-Pol-de-Léon as the see of the Bishop of Léon, whilst Coz-Yaudet was the see of Trégor before Tréguier. This proof would be perfect if the third diocese, Cornouaille, yielded late Empire fortifications at its main town, Quimper. It should be noted that one of the streets in Quimper bears the name Guéodet which, like Yaudet, is derived from *civitatem*.

Lastly, let me put forward a final similarity between the *civitates* of the Coriosolitae and the Ossismii which sets them apart from the other three. It was in their *territoria* that the Breton immigrants settled for preference, as revealed by a distribution map of parish names with the prefix *plou-*.

There is no doubt that, to solve the problem of the stationing of late Empire garrisons in Brittany, these relationships must be taken into account. For example, what is the relationship between the construction of town walls in certain *civitas* capitals, the abandonment of coastal fortifications such as those at Brest, Coz-Yaudet, and Alet? Is there any connexion between the transfer of certain capitals from the interior towards the coast and the construction of *castella*? Is it permissible to consider the splitting up of the *civitas* of the Ossismii into three smaller *civitates*, corresponding to Léon, Trégor, and Cornouaille? Is there any connexion between this fission and the arrival of the Breton immigrants?

[Translation: H F Cleere]