

Conclusion

This study of three important themes has enabled us to draw a number of interesting conclusions regarding urban change in fourth- and fifth-century Trier and Cologne, which have implications not only for ongoing and controversial debates, but also for established discourses. In Chapter One, we considered how and why the political circumstances of Trier and Cologne changed over the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, as a means of establishing a framework within which to discuss the processes of Christianisation and topographical change. We saw how Trier was a major imperial residence for much of the fourth century, and, as seat of the praetorian prefect, was the foremost administrative centre of the Gallic diocese. Cologne, meanwhile, was a primary base of the military generals who commanded the Rhine frontier troops, as well as being a provincial capital. In the 350s and the 380s, both cities suffered from barbarian incursions, as barbarian leaders exploited crises within the Empire, and sought to bolster their status amongst their followers in the face of the disruption of normal channels of imperial patronage. The effects of these attacks were transient, however, since the Empire responded swiftly and decisively to drive out and punish their perpetrators. At the end of the fourth century, the withdrawal of the imperial residence and praetorian prefecture from Trier signalled a fundamental shift in the Rhineland's importance within the imperial system and its associated defensive strategy. In 406, a major invasion took place across the Rhine frontier, from which imperial control in the Belgic and Germanic provinces would never really recover. The retreat of imperial institutions from the region was decisive in facilitating this invasion, even though it could not have been foreseen. The invasion was followed by a series of Frankish incursions, which apparently devastated Trier and Cologne. In attacking the Empire's frontier provinces, the Franks' motivations and behaviour – plundering moveable

wealth, and exploiting imperial inattention to the Rhine frontier – were no different from those of their fourth-century predecessors. Instead, it was the imperial authorities' failure to respond to the attacks that encouraged them to proliferate over an extended period. By the late fifth century, both Trier and Cologne were under the control of locally-based magnates, whose ethnic background was far less important in securing their position than was their capacity for effective government and military leadership. In Trier, the only such leader about whom information survives is a *comes* named Arbogast, whilst in Cologne, the Ripuarian Frankish kings, including Sigibert the Lame, evidently assumed control.

The main conclusions drawn in this first chapter – that the Empire's immediate neighbours did not pose a particularly potent threat to imperial control over the Rhineland, that diplomacy and gift-exchange were central to the regulation of relations between the Empire and these neighbours, and that the Empire was significantly responsible for its own downfall in the Rhineland – are not particularly novel in themselves, but draw significantly upon the work of historians including Drinkwater, Halsall, and Heather. However, in seeking to understand the political developments in the fourth- and fifth-century Roman Rhineland for the purpose of providing a framework for a study of urban change, rather than as an end in itself, this thesis does adopt a slightly different approach to that which has dominated modern scholarship. As a result of this approach, we have been able to achieve a detailed understanding of the nature of interactions at the Rhine frontier, of what had changed by the early fifth century, and of how local magnates themselves became motors for the evolution of a new political order by the late fifth century, as they sought to develop strategies for dealing with the Empire's loss of control. As such, this chapter represents an important

complement to existing scholarship, as well as providing the essential context for developments within our two cities themselves.

In Chapter Two, we investigated how these political changes affected a fundamental aspect of late antique urban life – Christianity. In so doing, we established that the discourse of the ‘rise of the bishop’, which emphasises the growing social importance of episcopal leadership during Late Antiquity, is not entirely applicable to either Trier or Cologne in the fourth and fifth centuries. In Trier, the episcopal succession remained unbroken throughout this period, but the bishops of the fifth century appear to have had a predominantly local sphere of influence, in marked contrast to their fourth-century predecessors and, indeed, their sixth-century successors. In Cologne, no bishops are identifiable for the period between the end of the fourth century and sometime shortly after the mid-sixth century, and it is likely that there was a lengthy hiatus in the episcopal succession. The status and influence of the cities’ bishops therefore appear to have been inextricably connected to their political circumstances; episcopal authority suffered as a consequence of imperial withdrawal from Trier, and flourished only in the presence of stable political leadership by secular rulers. In light of this, we may wish to re-examine the trajectories of episcopal authority in other cities to see if similar patterns exist, and perhaps to refine or reconsider our understanding of the relationship between secular and religious authority in Late Antiquity. In both Trier and Cologne, episcopal churches existed by the fourth century, and in Trier, these were complemented by a number of extra-mural *memoriae* associated with the cults of the city’s bishop-saints. These *memoriae* remained important in the fifth century, to judge by Bishop Cyrillus’ (c. 450/458) building of a new altar over the tomb of Eucharius. In Cologne, on the other hand, no such saints’ cults appear to have developed before the fifth century at the earliest, or perhaps even

the sixth century. As such, the Christian religion may have proved an important vehicle for continuity in fifth-century Trier, but it is extremely difficult to see how this could have been the case in Cologne. In both cities, it is irrefutable that the process of Christianisation stagnated in the fifth century, almost certainly as a result of the cities' much-changed political circumstances.

Chapter Three saw us narrow our focus further, and concentrate on the topographical changes that Trier and Cologne experienced during the fourth and fifth centuries. In the fourth century, both townscapes were clearly altered in ways that reflected the cities' roles in the imperial political system. In Trier, the presence of the imperial court and praetorian prefecture manifested itself in the construction of grand monumental buildings associated with the exercise and representation of imperial authority, including the *Basilika* and the *Kaiserthermen*, and in a heightened emphasis on the north-eastern quarter of the urban centre, in which the imperial palace complex was located. In Cologne, the *Praetorium* was extensively remodelled and the fortress of *Divitia* was built, reflecting the city's importance in the Empire's defensive strategy at the Rhine frontier. In the fifth century, however, the cities' coherent townscapes fragmented rapidly, as monumental buildings were no longer maintained, and, to judge by the extreme paucity of finds of possible fifth-century date, large swathes of intra-mural space were abandoned. These changes may have been connected to some extent with the Empire's withdrawal from the Rhineland at the end of the fourth century and the series of barbarian attacks of the first half of the fifth century, but it would be presumptive to assume that this was necessarily the case. The failure to maintain monumental buildings and the disintegration of the urban environment were relatively widespread phenomena in the fifth century, even in cities that remained under the control of the central imperial authorities until a comparatively late stage, and were

relatively little affected by barbarian attacks. The fact that Trier and Cologne received major new buildings in the fourth century at the behest of the emperors, before apparently reverting to a relatively normal pattern of urban change for fifth-century Gaul following imperial withdrawal from the Rhineland, reminds us of the way in which late antique topographical change was the product of political circumstances, and of the complex and shifting interplay between centrally-sponsored initiatives and local tendencies.

The conclusions drawn from our consideration of each individual theme are, therefore, of some significance. However, arguably the most important contribution this study makes to modern scholarship, not only on Trier and Cologne, but also on urban change in Late Antiquity more generally, is as an illustration of the value of a comparative approach. In this study, which compares two cities with very different roles in the imperial political system, this methodology has enabled us to identify important similarities between the cities, which may be indicative of more general patterns of change, but also to recognise crucial differences, which suggest that the cities' specific positions within the Empire had a real influence on their development. The cities were alike in receiving new and upgraded monumental buildings on the initiative of the emperors in the fourth century, for example, but it is important to recognise that the types of building projects undertaken reflected the cities' very different roles within the imperial system. In the fifth century, meanwhile, a deterioration in episcopal authority is identifiable in both cities, but the fact that this was much more pronounced in Cologne than in Trier is an indication of the extent to which the emperors' presence in fourth-century Trier catalysed the process of Christianisation and embedded the concept of episcopal leadership within local society. Moreover, by incorporating only two cities in this study, we have been able to discuss processes of urban change in considerable

detail, and to consider problems that matter greatly to the history of each individual city, but that are too local in character to warrant attention in studies that discuss urban change within a larger geographical area. These problems include, but are not limited to, such vexed questions as whether Trier really had a Bishop Maternus, and how to unpick the knotty history of Cologne's early cathedral church. In light of these benefits, it is to be hoped that extending this comparative methodology to other cities in the Rhineland and its vicinity, such as Mainz, Metz, or Reims, may further help to refine our understanding of urban change in the region as a whole in Late Antiquity. A promising starting-point for this may be to develop this study of Trier and Cologne through the incorporation of a third city – perhaps Metz or Reims – which was neither on the frontier nor an imperial capital, in order to see how the findings from a more 'average' provincial centre compare with those discussed here. Applying the approach to other cities in other regions of the Roman West, meanwhile, may help to enhance our grasp of patterns of urban change more generally, and of the importance of a city's geographical and socio-political circumstances in determining the changes it experienced.

Finally, the evidence drawn from this comparative study enables us to make an informed judgement on the important issue raised at the beginning of this thesis; how to characterise late antique urban change in Trier and Cologne. To remind ourselves, historians of recent years have tended either to emphasise processes of decline, particularly in respect of the cities' administrative functions and their visual impact, or else to highlight ways in which the cities were transformed, especially through the growth of Christianity, but also by means of a raft of changes that were not necessarily for better nor for worse. With regard to Trier and Cologne, it is clear that Trier's political status enabled it and the Rhineland as a whole to flourish in the fourth century, as new buildings were constructed and local magnates exploited the opportunities

presented to them by their proximity to the imperial court. In the fifth century, however, it is obvious that the cities' populations dropped significantly, and that their structural fabric deteriorated, as buildings were allowed to fall to ruin. The growth of the Christian Church, which is frequently cited as one of the motors of urban continuity, slowed to a virtual halt in the fifth century in both cities. As such, whilst Trier fared slightly better than Cologne, and even if the term 'decline' is perhaps best avoided as overtly pejorative, there can be no escaping from the fact that in the fifth century, both cities became less grand, less coherently structured, less populous, and, at least in religious terms, less culturally vibrant. On the other hand, our picture of fifth-century Trier and Cologne need not be too gloomy. In spite of their troubles, the cities evidently remained important centres for their surrounding hinterlands, at least in administrative terms, and as such, the seeds for renewed growth in the sixth century were very much in place.