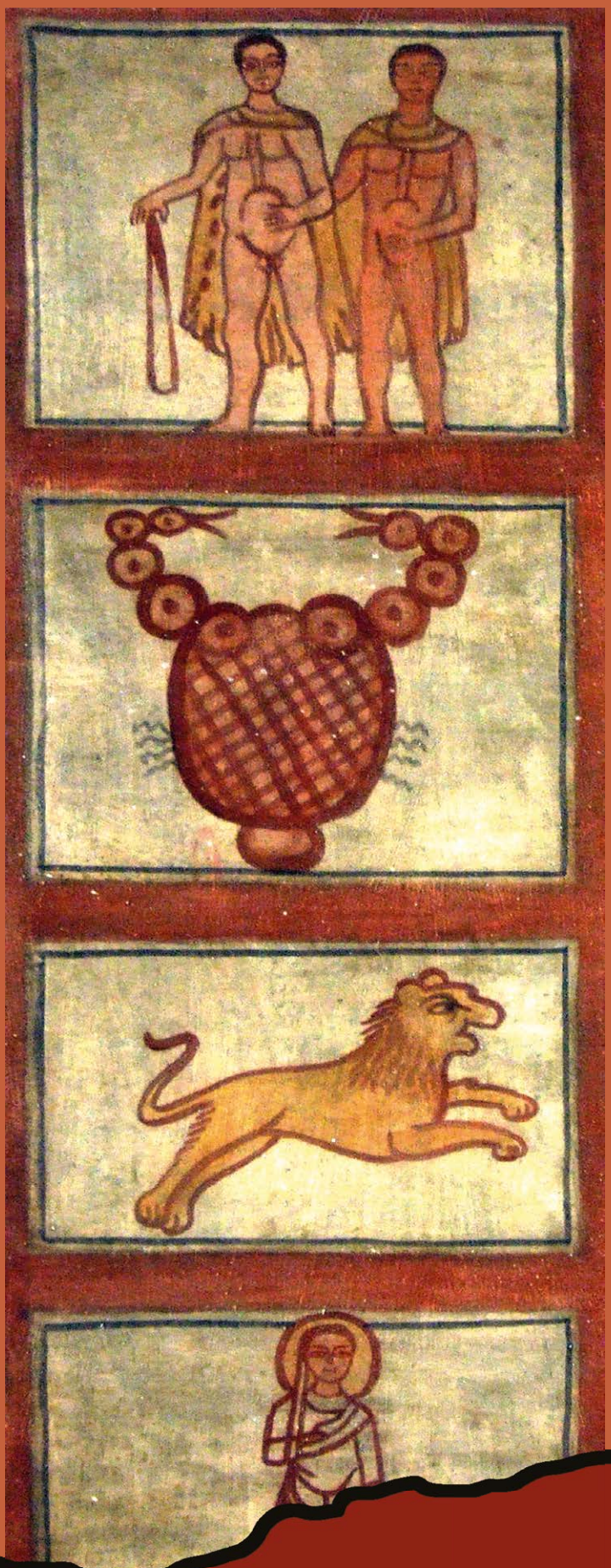

# Relativism and the Frontiers of Empire

## Critical Perspectives on Roman Soldiers, Communities and Military Landscapes

Edited by
Anna Walas and Andrew Birley

Roman Frontier Studies

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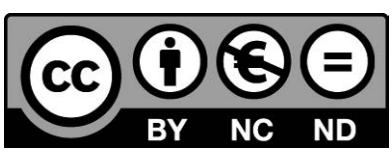
Cover: Zodiac wall painting from the Mithraeum at Dura-Europos, featuring the figure with scales (Libra), symbolising the weighing of perspectives central to the volume's theme of legacies of cultural relativism. Dura-Europos is also a key focus of Simon James' research, making the image a fitting tribute to his influence on frontier studies. As a culturally plural frontier site shaped by empire and excavation histories, Dura embodies the challenges and opportunities of a decolonial approach to the Roman past. With many thanks to Lisa Brody and the Yale University Art Gallery for the permission to use the image.



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## Part 5: Relativism and Cultures of Violence

# Dedication

The editors and authors of this volume have a common and special bond. They have all been enriched and inspired by the work of their friend, colleague and collaborator, Professor Simon James. It is to his leadership, inspiration and skill as one of the foremost Roman scholars of his generation that so many new perspectives have been possible on the Roman military and its communities. For over 40 years, Professor James' research has inspired generations of scholars and students. This volume is a testament to Simon's influence both on the field itself, and perhaps more importantly, on the members of our academic community who have had the pleasure of working with, learning from and knowing Professor Simon James.

Professor James' career started at the Institute of Archaeology of London, where he completed his first degree in Archaeology. At the same institution, he later undertook a PhD on the assemblage of Roman and Sasanian arms and armour from Dura Europos, Syria. It was this work that provided the foundation of his interests in, and many contributions to Dura-Europos studies and his collaborations with Yale University Art Gallery. Whilst studying the material, Simon worked as an archaeological illustrator and later took up the post of an educational curator at the British Museum, responsible for the prehistoric and Roman collections. During this time, Simon authored books on the subject of 'Celts' and the Iron Age. He also continued to work

Photograph of Professor Simon James working at Dura Europos

on his PhD, often on London buses whilst commuting to and from his work. His illustrations, both for the British Museum and those drawn for his PhD publication, have set the foundation of his advocacy for visual literacy and reconstruction in archaeology. Following a decade at the British Museum, Simon won a Leverhulme Trust funded Special Research Fellowship at the University of Durham to allow him to complete his work on the Dura-Europos arms and armour. While at Durham, he developed a fondness for the Northeast of England, and collaborations with colleagues in the area, on Hadrian's Wall and beyond. Durham was also where he met his wife, Jill, his next-door neighbour.

In 2000, Simon James joined the School of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Leicester, first as a Lecturer. He was swiftly promoted to Senior Lecturer in 2002 and a Reader in 2005, becoming a Professor of Archaeology in 2012. Simon started working in Syria in 1998 and over many years devoted to the study of Dura-Europos he developed a fondness in the archaeology, the people, culture and cuisine of the region. Between 2001 and 2010 he was an associated researcher with la Mission Franco-Syrienne d'Europos-Doura. During this time, Simon undertook a new survey of the Roman military base and valuable fieldwork research on its archaeology. 2004 saw the publication of Simon's work on the arms and armour from Dura Europos as the Final Report Volume VII of the Dura-Europos reports. Time spent with the Franco-Syrian expedition provided material for his subsequent work on the appraisal of archival records of the archaeology of the Roman military base portion of the Dura-Europos site. Simon's research has had a significant international footprint. He held an Ida Beam Distinguished Visiting Professorship at the university of Iowa in 2004, and in 2006 the Archaeological Institute of America sponsored his Samuel H. Kress lecture tour in the US. Simon was subsequently elected Life Corresponding Member of the Archaeological Institute of America in recognition of achieving imminence in his field of archaeology. His second major monograph produced whilst at the University of Leicester was dedicated to the role of warriors and weapons in the development of the Roman Empire, and in 2019 he published his long-anticipated volume on the Roman military base in Dura-Europos. Professor Simon James' time at the University of Leicester resulted in several PhD students, who have been inspired to pursue research on Dura Europos and Roman frontiers.

Aside from achieving multiple academic accolades, Simon has also made a continuing effort to support the academic community through service in organisations and committees, both within the UK and abroad. He has held the roles of the Chair of Publication Committee of the Council for British Archaeology, served as a member of the Council of the Royal Archaeological Institute and was a member of the Council of the Society of the Promotion of Roman Studies and a member of the Society's Archaeology Committee. Simon's passion for the heritage of the Near East, also led him to be actively involved in the Palestine Exploration Fund, serving as a member of the Executive Committee and of the Grants Committee. Simon also served as an assistant editor for *Levant*, the journal of the Council for British Research in the Levant, further showing his enduring commitment and enthusiasm to the region and its history.

In addition to many achievements gained during his career at the University of Leicester, Simon has also devoted time and effort to supporting initiatives that promote interest in Roman armies among the public and those that benefit both serving and retired military personnel. In 2012, he became the President of the Ermine Street Guard, the oldest Roman military research and enactment group in Britain. In 2019, he co-founded and later became a specialist advisor of Wings to the Past, an initiative to support resilience amongst serving personnel and their families. During his academic career he also collaborated with, encouraged, supported and led projects involving Operation Nightingale, whose logo he designed. The connection with modern militaries took a new course in 2014, when he became the director of the Ancient Akrotiri Project, conducting maritime archaeology research at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus, in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, the Sovereign Base Area authorities and the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus. The collaboration with the Ministry of Defence led to further survey work in Dhekelia, another SBA area in Cyprus. In 2017, the DIO selected Ancient Akrotiri Project as the Runner Up for the Sanctuary Awards in the Heritage Project Award category, testifying to Simon's contribution to heritage protection in the area. Simon has also been dedicated to public communication of archaeology, having authored several accessible books whilst working at the British Museum. In 2024, he provided input into a popular book accompanying the British Museums' 'Legion life in the Roman army' exhibition book.

Simon has been a prolific writer throughout his career, with his work covering topics as wide as military equipment studies, the 'Celtic' Iron Age, Dura-Europos, Roman Britain, Late Roman Empire, visual competence and reconstruction in archaeology, maritime archaeology, violence in ancient societies, Roman Germany, early Medieval building methods and archaeological theory. These achievements are no doubt influenced by his belief in the value of allowing and finding serendipity in research, but also his commitment to a regular early morning writing schedule. This volume is a result of Professor James'

many contributions to our field, his leadership, enthusiasm, good-will and a sense of humour, which have all endeared him to many colleagues. We dedicate this volume to Simon and hope that the fires of curiosity, exploration and discovery he has lit in so many continue to push the boundaries of our knowledge of the Roman army, communities and military landscapes.

Thank you to our funders.

The authors are extremely grateful to the Vindolanda Trust for providing its support and funding towards this volume. Many of the papers within this edited volume are enhanced by their discussion and use of material that has come from this iconic Roman site on the northern frontier of Roman Britain.

# Relativism and the Other in the Study of Rome's Frontiers

Anna Walas and Andrew Birley

## Introduction

*Relativism and the Frontiers of Empire* captures a moment in the development of agendas in the study of Rome's frontiers, whilst highlighting the legacy of a classic anthropological concept. The volume adopts the theme of cultural relativism as an umbrella term, which allows opening to a range of post-colonial, positional and relational approaches that rely on contextualising frontiers within their cultural frameworks and recognising the significance of the standpoint of the scholar in production of knowledge; the two key tenets of anthropological cultural relativism. As Europe's archaeological scholarship is developing its post-colonial self-awareness, this volume aims to challenge Rome-centric approaches to Roman frontiers. Decolonisation is still an emergent field in Roman archaeology overall. As many contributions in this volume show, Roman frontiers are an area of research with particularly deep links to intellectual legacies of the colonial era. The study of Rome's frontiers is often subsumed under the term 'provincial archaeology', which assumes a relation to Rome and its position as the point of reference. Just as the concept of what constitutes the centre and the periphery is relative to one's own position, relativism in the context of this volume can be taken to mean that knowledge, truth, and ethics exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are therefore not absolute. The application of the theme of relativism allows for different views, experiences and ontologies to be explored without judging one to be more valid than another. It offers the freedom to explore different perspectives while acknowledging that many of those discussions will be uncomfortable or challenging to those who do not share that point of view.

Relativism has had an enduring, yet at times contested role in the history of archaeological theory. Its uptake in archaeology reflects the discipline's efforts to grapple with the complexity of interpreting the past with the awareness of the influence of present-day political and societal discourse. This challenge has particularly been felt in the field of Roman frontier studies over the last decade, as borders and borderlands have become a politically troubled topic of research. Between 1990s and 2010s, the status quo of modern Europe 'without borders' helped the subject of Rome's frontiers remain palatable and largely detached from contemporary politics (Gardner 2024:4), with only some poking beneath the veneer of this 'bloodless past' (James 2007: 2012). Recent transformations in the contemporary world, including waves of conflict in Europe and the Middle East and the acceleration of the process of 're-bordering' (Gardner 2024: 6) have drastically changed this landscape and necessitate a fresh approach to the subject of Rome's frontiers. On the one hand, the ascent of decolonial critique has question the validity of pursuing universalising truths, highlighting the otherness of the Roman past and the multiplicity and relativity of individual perspectives within it. On the other hand, episodes of contemporary conflict have also coincided with debates around the dangers of total, especially moral relativism.

This introductory chapter locates the volume within the trajectory of adoption of cultural relativism in archaeological theory, highlighting its legacies in contemporary approaches to Roman frontiers deployed in this volume. The chapter then considers the potential value of contemporary approaches to cultural relativism in anthropology, understood both as a concept and a methodological tool for studying other cultures. Finally, the chapter presents the key themes the volume addresses, including the challenges of positioning the study of Rome's frontiers in the 21st century, development of decolonial approaches to Rome's frontier communities, accompanied by the need to unsettle status quos in research on imperial culture in Rome's provinces, to finally, redefining notions of belonging and non-belonging on the frontiers and the cultures of systemic and interpersonal violence underpinning these. Many of the contemporary approaches applied in this volume owe their lineage to debates surrounding cultural relativism originally developed during the postmodern turn, continuing to inform contemporary debates in Roman archaeology. Cultural relativism, applied here to the scholarship from the frontiers of the empire, provides the important room for critical perspectives and approaches on Roman soldiers, communities and military landscapes to be given their own context. The editors hope that the volume will encourage a reflection regarding the production of difference and alterity in academic engagement with Rome's frontiers.

## Critical perspectives on cultural relativism

The application of relativism finds its intellectual roots in traditional approaches to culture in anthropology.

It was at Ellis Island that Franz Boas' work on newly arrived immigrants and their experiences in America influenced his perspective of acknowledging the historical and cultural contexts of different societies. This research led Boas to emphasise that cultural perceptions and practices are relative to their specific cultural backgrounds. Through his fieldwork in Ellis Island, Boas engaged in challenging assumptions involved in the processing of immigrants, highlighting the necessity of a nuanced understanding of the other and confronting Western biases (Ulin 2007: 809-810). It is not insignificant for this volume that Ellis Island operated as one of the busiest frontier zones of the early 20th century, ultimately becoming a cultural symbol of America. More than 22 million people entered the country through this point (Dolmage 2011: 24). Ellis Island operated as the most effective immigration processing station for sixty years, until the federal government permanently closed it in 1954 (Galusca 2009: 136). Ellis Island was an ultimate frontier for millions of people, but it was also there that the US state engaged in policing and limiting immigration, and in the process exercising its many relations of power. The migrant inspection process witnessed by Boas was a choreographed spectacle of difference based on characteristics including race, disability, gender, ethnicity and citizenship (Dolmage 2011: 30-31). Observations of these practices made by Boas a century ago, eerily echo the preoccupation of contemporary Border Studies regarding formulation of difference and belonging in liminal areas, termed as border making and border crossing practices. Frontiers and borders are important conceptual categories with which we perceive identities and cultural differences; the intellectual legacy of relativist approaches can be found at the source of the frontiers' anthropological discussion. It is worth noting that within Roman frontier studies decades prior to adoption of relativism more widely within archaeology, and under the influence of experiences of World War II, Alföldi (1952) drew from the tradition when discussing a perceived moral barrier on the Rhine and Danube in an early example of a reflection of how contemporary politics inform the practice of Roman archaeology.

Archaeology first took on a systematic effort to embrace relativistic thinking in response to the 'postmodern turn' of the 1980s. This period, drawing on concepts from post-structural linguistics and literary theory, challenged the prevailing positivist and processual paradigms dominant since the 1960s (Fahlander 2013: 3). The aim of critique initiated in literary studies was to highlight the lack of feasible methods to define absolute truths and principles (Eagleton 2003: 103). It was suggested that a text's meaning resides in its interpretation, indicating that no 'true' or definitive reading exists, and any original meaning is unattainable (Barthes 1977: 142-148). In response to this within archaeology, Ian Hodder (1991: 106, 152) and Christopher Tilley (1990) influenced an intellectual shift, casting doubt on the objectivity of historical narratives and arguing that archaeological interpretations are always historically and culturally situated. By questioning universal, singular truths about the past, this wave of thought engrained the principles of relativism in subsequent theoretical debates, providing a foundation for more refined approaches.

However, on one end of the spectrum, a more radical strand of relativism dubbed 'hyper-relativism' attracted critique, when concerns arose that relativism risked devolving into an extreme position where all interpretations were considered equally valid. The 'anything goes' hyper-relativism was present in the field since the 1970s (Crellin *et al.* 2021: 164) and, as critics argued, it threatened the intellectual foundation of the discipline by undermining the possibility of evaluating, or prioritising, certain interpretations over others (Knapp 1996: 131; Trigger 1989). At its extreme end, the question of the place of authority in cultural relativist thought led some to point that if there is no difference between truth and error, and if all interpretations are equal, then the stance paves the way for nihilism: if much of knowledge is essentially contradictory, then one cannot know the truth about the past (Vattimo 1988). Such a viewpoint would ultimately disempower archaeology as a viable source of knowledge about the past (Trigger 1991: 69; Knapp 1996: 135). While both hyper-relativism and nihilism challenged the existence of absolute truths, hyper-relativism focuses on the equal validity of all perspectives, leading to a lack of authority and action, whereas nihilism threatened a sense of meaninglessness in archaeological interpretation. These concerns still remain poignant, given current discourse around the 'post truth' era.

In response, Bhaskar's (1989) work on philosophy of science countered this tendency by proposing frameworks that would maintain the culturally and temporally situated nature of knowledge (epistemological relativism) without descending into 'judgemental relativism,' which rejects the capacity to assess competing interpretations. Mainstream archaeological theory soon subscribed to this more measured take on relativism (Shanks and Hodder 1994; Pluciennik *et al.* 1997: 175) surmising that 'while we accept that different accounts of the past may be written by different people, they are equally deserving of our scrutiny' (Thomas and Tilley 1992: 108). By the late 1990s, practitioners of epistemological cultural relativism in archaeological discourse saw it as a way to explore the tension between knowledge and politics and to recognise pluralism and promote anti-hegemonic discourses. At the time, cultural relativism

was also seen as a possible tool to counter a narrow view of objectivism in nationalistic narratives' use of the archaeological record (Pluciennik *et al.* 1997: 163-183), an issue all too familiar to those studying modern receptions of Rome's frontiers. The observations were shared by Hodder who recognised that the world we live in is becoming increasingly relativist on account of processes of economic, informational and social globalisation and glocalisation (Hodder 1997: 192-194). These themes continue to grow in significance both in the wider field of Roman archaeology and in the study of frontier zones.

Decolonisation of former empires of Western Europe reverberated through academic discourse, through critique of reductive ideas of social hierarchy, objectivity of Western perspectives and a critique of notions of linear progress. Ideas regarding cultural relativism contributed to such changes (Gosden 2004: 163-165). One of the key things that cultural relativism missed, however, was the post-colonial recognition of the significance of power relations in the production of knowledge. An approach that gave equal weight to all perspectives risked obscuring the realities of contemporary global geopolitics and military power dynamics. Subsequent developments in post-colonial scholarship underscores the necessity of incorporating political power, economic inequalities, and military force into our analyses of both present and historical contexts (Hingley 2013: 11). With time, developing perspectives that drew from the tradition of cultural relativism shifted the focus from the polyphony of past social diversity (cultural relativism) and progressed towards present-day interpretative pluralism (Fahlander 2013: 3). Various strands of archaeology emphasised collaborative, multivocal approaches to the past, and aimed to decentralise colonialist narratives in archaeology, questioning who 'owns' the past (Habu, Fawcett, and Matsunaga 2008). More recent developments in relational archaeology, emphasising interconnectedness and processes of social relationality signal the enduring legacy of cultural relativism in archaeological thought. The legacy of relativism's strive towards non-hierarchical and non-Eurocentric approaches forms part of the underpinnings of many recent theoretical developments for understanding multiple ontologies and epistemologies (Crellin *et al.* 2021: 152, 180).

Within Roman archaeology decolonial perspectives led to challenging universalising ideas about the nature of change and civilisation, originally packaged as the paradigm of Romanization. It is now recognised that the idea of a homogenising Roman civilisation was as representative of the self-justifying discourses of Western empires during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as it was a narrative of Rome. Romanization has progressively been replaced with an increasingly fragmented array of theoretical approaches (Gardner 2024: 1-5), although very much in the spirit of pluralism, there currently does not seem to be a unifying paradigm in the field. Change towards emphasis on multiplicity of perspectives is also visible in the study of Rome's frontiers, with a shift away from totalising 'grand' narratives of all Rome's frontiers (Luttwak 1976; Whittaker 1994) towards large studies focusing on more particular and earlier marginalised perspectives on the subject.

Western eurocentrism present in modern receptions of Roman past did not escape our colleagues in anthropology departments. For anthropologist, their discipline germinated as a counter-culture within the entity known as the West, with Rome seen as conceptually representing an earlier manifestation of a similar set of hegemonic, cultural constructs (Johnson 2007: 796). It is no surprise that decolonisation has been particularly felt in anthropology as a discipline with its origins intertwined with colonialism; from early anthropological research aiding colonial administration, supporting colonial ideology, contributing to the maintenance of colonial power structures and preoccupation with production of knowledge by Europeans for specifically European audiences (Asad 1979: 85-90). Many of these characterisations of late nineteenth and twentieth century anthropology could also be applied to Roman archaeology. There are also some parallels between the developmental trajectories of anthropology and archaeology and their shared historical and intellectual contexts. Both disciplines were intertwined with the context of European colonial expansion and encounters with other cultures. Both disciplines share interdisciplinary roots and practice of fieldwork, albeit participant observation in anthropology as opposed to excavation, a difference we shall return to later. Crucially, both disciplines have had to pivot in response to the changing outlook of theory in humanities, including post-colonialism, globalisation theories, and now posthumanism and the ontological turns. Just as scholars in Roman studies are grappling with what are now less than fortunate terms, such as 'classical civilisation' as a concept arising from a distinctly European outlook and disciplinary legacy of an imperial gaze onto the other, so anthropologists are asking questions whether American Studies, should in fact, be folded into the discipline of anthropology (Perusek 2007: 832). The question is posed based on deconstructing notions of culture and relativism that are problematic. In the study of Rome's frontiers, it is now widely acknowledged that association of Rome with the familiar that broadly aligns with the 'Western' has resulted in modernising assumptions about the Roman armies (James 2002) and is problematic if we are to deconstruct colonial legacies of our discipline.

A somewhat reverse problem holds in anthropology. Here the iconic association of the discipline with the study of the distant and the exotic inevitably skews the perceptions of culture, cultural relativism and the other in the opposite direction of overstating differences between societies (Perusek 2007: 832).

At this point it is worth asking where the legacy of cultural relativism could take us further. Renewed efforts have recently been made to revisit it as a conceptual and methodological tool. For example, Brown's (2008) Cultural Relativism 2.0 proposes that as an intellectual standpoint cultural relativism retains its function of keeping anthropology attentive to perspectives that challenge received truths and value curiosity about the nature of difference. Brown's version of cultural relativism acknowledges the existence of human universals and considers the cultural dimensions of globalisation and intersocietal diversity, emphasising that while culture varies in a continuous way, 'cultural identities' tend to be bounded and discontinuous. For most contemporary anthropologists, however, cultural relativism is a research methodology that consists of participant observation, with the researcher having an awareness about their own position in the process of observation (Perusek 2007: 833). Cultural relativism is as much about evaluating cultures in their own frameworks, as it is about cultivating objectivity towards the object of research and simultaneously acting reflexively towards one's own culture. As the process of research inevitably affects the observer's evaluation of their own cultural context, there can never be total objectivity (Johnson 2007: 795). For anthropologists then, participant-observation is a dialogue between self and other.

More recently, Kapferer and Theodossopoulos (2016) revisited the troubled legacy of exoticism and Europe's colonial characterisation of the 'exotic Other' originally explored by Said (1978). Kapferer and Theodossopoulos returned to the etymological origins of the term exotic, emphasizing its fundamental connection to externality. Rooted in the Greek adverb *éxo* (outside) and adjective *exotikós* (from the outside), for Kepferer the term signals an orientation toward what lies beyond the internal or familiar, making it an inherently relational term. In this take on cultural relativism, the exotic, can be understood as 'the outside' or 'the familiar seen from the outside' and is as much about how the external world is imagined as it is about how the familiar becomes reframed when viewed through a lens of separation. Kapferer and Theodossopoulos (2016: 138-141) posit that sociocultural realities themselves are not exotic; rather, they become exoticized when social actors position and reposition themselves in exteriority to such realities. This deconstructive approach advocates for a dynamic view of otherness and exteriority and seeks to unravel the power structures that underpinned exoticism. In this transfiguration of cultural relativism there is scope to expand our understanding of both self and other.

The reflexive dynamic of understanding self through the study of the other has a deep tradition in the discourse of Rome's frontiers and border regions as we saw it the example of Alföldi's (1952) 'moral barrier' argument, clearly influenced by the East-West divide following the beginning of the Cold War. The reflexivity inherent in the study of Rome's frontiers does not stop there, as is proven by more recent research on modern identities and Roman frontiers in the wake of the Brexit referendum (Gardner 2017) and the current popularity of applications of bordering approach to study the Roman past, partially influenced by the changing nature of imperialism in 21st century. The state of approaches to frontiers is a gauge of pressure in attitudes towards us versus the other. Just as a pointer on the dial of the barometer, to study frontiers and border zones is to study the razor's edge of conceptions of otherness; the way societies past and present define difference across frontiers; how individuals, communities and the state engaged in this discourse to express, blur, amplify and subvert identity categories of self and other. By engaging in dialogue with the tradition of cultural relativism contributions in this volume challenge many traditional approaches to frontiers, allowing for those more nuanced interpretations. It is hoped that this volume will push the discipline one step further towards a perspective on Roman frontiers that can be non-colonising and enable further debates in the field. This volume contains 21 thought provoking papers which are grouped into five thematic chapters.

## Contributions to this volume and conclusions

### *Part 1. Roman Frontiers repositioned*

This chapter explores interpretations of frontiers and the ideas behind them, in particular examining ways in which de-coloniality of Roman studies parallels other periods and frontiers. This section also challenges the terminology surrounding the very definition of a 'frontier'. In doing so, papers in this section take up the question of objectivity in the way disciplinary discourse of Rome's frontiers and borderlands spaces is constructed and provide reflexive comments regarding the development and the future directions of the field.

Mattingly's opening paper goes straight to the heart of cultural relativism by questioning 'whether the over-emphasis of the idea of Roman frontiers could be construed in the 21st century as a huge intellectual misstep within the discipline of Classical Studies?' And if this has impeded rather than aided our

understanding of what a Roman army was for and what it did. He deftly deconstructs the simple binary of what a frontier is and was for before moving on to discussing the potential differences between states and empires. This important contribution covers the origins of Roman frontier studies and highlights the risks of the dualistic and simplistic view of 'enemies' outside and 'Romans' inside before approaching the frontier zone of North Africa as a case study. Here he considers a series of separate security zones rather than a homogeneous frontier before settling on the term 'security zone' as preferable to frontier. This paper encourages us to give more thought to the local experience of the Roman army by civilian populations in the province. His final and powerful arguments support the volume's theme when he links to his own moral reflections in his contribution. Mattingly observes that his own experience of the local view of the Roman period in North Africa and the Middle East has been influenced by what and who he has encountered during his work in the area.

Mattingly's paper sets up very well the following contribution by Gardner, entitled 'Frontiers and the Roman Empire: a comparative perspective'. Gardner reminds us of Roman military communities and the frontier regions in which their members lived playing a fundamental role in shaping the cultural, economic, and political trajectory of the Empire over the long-term. He explores the historicity of the tension between border-crossing and border-making. Gardner also questions whether there is a basic human characteristic at play between connection and isolation, and perhaps evident at a range of scales, and, if so, how does it vary cross-culturally? Like Mattingly, Gardner reprises the scholarship of Roman frontiers today and the development of its study with a focus on the improvements and achievements by 'promoting a more sociological account of the Roman military, in contrast with the earlier 20th century approaches which were much more aligned with straightforward military history'. He readily acknowledges the important contributions here of van Driel Murray, James and Miller (Driel-Murray 2002; James 2011; Miller 1996), before exploring contemporary comparisons of Roman 'zones' with his 'Imperial' frontiers in North America. This paper is carefully balanced and due care is given to the numerous differences of the climate and landscape, technology, ecological and epidemiological factors, and hugely distinctive indigenous cultures as well as the striking similarities of the 'overarching interplay of boundary-crossing and boundary-making, which should make us attend ever more closely to the precise ways in which this worked across the range of Roman frontiers'.

In 'From French Conquest to Algerian Independence: French Foreign Legion and the Roman Legionary Base at Lambaesis,' Walas provides a detailed examination of the Foreign Legion's use of a significant Roman military site during the Algerian War of Independence. This chapter highlights the necessity of exploring contemporary colonial histories of sites like Lambaesis to understand the production and utilisation of knowledge about these sites, identifying who was involved and who was marginalized in these processes. The site's excavation history, beginning during the French conquest of Algeria (1830-1848), reveals a compelling narrative of colonial archaeology and the involvement of modern militaries within it. The Algerian War of Independence brought another wave of Foreign Legion troops. The chapter uncovers this previously untold chapter of Lambaesis and the Foreign Legion, exploring how the Foreign Legion's engagement with the site evolved over a century and its implications for interpreting Lambaesis as Roman frontier heritage in the 21st century.

In a paper entitled 'Frontiers of the concept' López asks the question, are the terms 'Romanization' and 'Islamization' comparable? This paper takes a very different approach and direction to the previous three as López, a scholar who specialises in the history of Islam, explores parallels between the conceptual ways in which we consider 'the way in which two expanding entities generate their borders with what is external to them'. While acknowledging that neither Rome nor Islam are directly analogous to one another, the implied transformations at a social and cultural level and the ways in which scholars have approached each topic can offer valuable lessons for the future. Romanization and Islamization are contested terms, and López thoughtfully provokes debate in considering the ways in which we approach and explore cultural changes and relativism through a post-colonial prism.

Jones's paper on 'Reflections on 'Writing the Legions': Roman military scholarship' is an important look into the gaps between the camps or schools of thought that developed in the UK in Roman archaeology in the 20th century. It considers how these schisms in scholarship have impacted the way in which frontier archaeology has been approached. Jones highlights the British north versus south divide (Jones is from the northern camp – self declared) and explores the impact of the clashes between the 'golden triangle' of Oxford, Cambridge and London in the south and the northern schools in England, such as Durham and Newcastle those in Scotland, Edinburgh and Glasgow. This divide was not restricted to a divergence of ideas and thought but it was also further reinforced by clashes of personality and lived experiences. Jones discusses how scholars brought their own cultural influences to the table and

how this impacted their work and in particular, the role that military service played (or the lack of it) from the period of the two world Wars on the focus of scholarly endeavours.

Haynes paper completes the first chapter of the volume by bringing us back to themes explored by Mattingly, questioning the very concept of what a frontier is or how we interpret spaces through the presence of the military. In this case we look towards the core of the empire including Rome itself as he explores the role of bases in Roman cities. In 'Visualising Roman military bases in cities: The challenge of Rome's Castra Nova', Haynes highlights the breadth of diversity within Rome itself, which can be explored through elements of its military and urban populations. Like James (James 2019: vii, 42) Haynes is a visual thinker and through this methodology he explores the lived spaces of the Castra Nova. His approach has provided new levels of interpretations, creating a third and sometimes fourth dimension by which we can imagine and repopulate spaces and places. This allows us to break down the boundaries that have been created in scholarship between 'two groups', urban/civilian and urban/ military who may have been far less monolithic than has previously been imagined.

***Part 2. De-colonial approaches to relations on Rome's frontiers***

The personal and political relations on the frontier are a key theme of his chapter, allowing for the various contributions to turn tables on long-held views on the nature of specific political events, regional narratives and interpretations of object categories. The approaches taken in the individual papers within this chapter draw from the cultural relativist tradition in that they question traditional standpoints and implicit assumptions regarding the nature of the other taken both by Roman writers and past scholars.

Merrills' paper, 'Speak Softly and Carry a Big Cross: Diplomacy, Evangelism and Ignorance on Justinian's African Frontier' explores an aspect and time in the life and development of frontier or security zones which has been often neglected. While the relationship between Justinian and his grand military strategies are an active topic of debate, the detailed way in which these efforts manifested themselves on the ground, and in particular the impact on the lives of local populations has been far less considered. Merrills offers a complex picture of competing evangelical missions, and in his converting of the desert, he reconsiders the sparse archaeological evidence from the ground for early Christian missionaries at oasis communities located between the western desert of Egypt and the Libyan Fazzan. Competing narratives are the norm, from different historians and scholars to primary sources, and Merrills' chapter entitled 'conversion and confusion on the frontier' epitomises how a single narrative of this subject would be woefully inadequate in allowing for the often-disparate experiences of those who lived through those times.

Reddé's 'Les maléfices de la mer Rouge (The Malevolent Spirit of the Red Sea)' takes us to the east of the Nile to the Red Sea coast. He discusses how the often-disparate Roman sources described this area and of the various expeditions that are supposed to have taken place at this edge of the empire. Those precious sources are now being supplemented by more and more archaeological excavations carried out in the Eastern Desert of Egypt which have yielded many new papyrological documents, mainly on ostraca, which are providing unprecedented information about daily life in military outposts. Reddé shows us 'a complex landscape, centred around a nearly enclosed maritime domain, where not all the lands were directly subject to direct Roman authority, and difficult navigation made the formation of a war fleet improbable (and, in any case, very uncertain) and where security measures were local' rather than on a larger scale.

'Torcs transformed' is a fresh look at late Iron Age and Romano-British beaded torcs by Hunter who transports the reader many thousands of miles away from Egypt to the north of Britain. Hunter discusses an artefact type and aspect of material culture which can be viewed as a totemic symbol of the iron age, the Torc. The known pattern of distribution of the various types of these artefacts has been substantially changed by metal detection and the portable antiquities scheme which is altering the narrative about the meanings surrounding the wearing of these adornments, be they in the civilian or military zones. Hunter's paper raises questions about whether or not torcs were still seen as a local form or if through exposure to Roman culture the act surrounding the wearing of a torc had itself been transformed. This paper raises questions about the relative power of this artefact.

The theme of cultural identity and affiliation are further explored by Greene in her paper entitled 'Expressions of cultural affiliation reflecting the dynamic creation of Roman auxiliary communities'. Greene breaks down the 'large monolithic group of the army and its corporate identity' to examine the individual through personal identity and the evidence for its expression. This offers a great deal of room for the discussion of cultural relativism and Greene considers how many different meanings can be found in a range of material culture, from inscriptions on stone which can be seen to have expressed a sense of corporate identity which is separate from being purely 'Roman', to the affiliations

evidenced in the Vindolanda writing tablets. In this paper, personal and private choices are considered that may have had cultural associations or represented religious preferences. Greene highlights the merits of exploring the degrees of difference and layering of identities, balanced with a careful consideration of the complexities and contradictions that this can bring.

***Part 3. Relativist deconstructions of imperial culture***

In section three we are reminded that there are no simple binary ways to interpret the evidence from frontier provinces – and if we allow ourselves a broader perspective on how the objects were meant to be perceived our interpretations can be enriched by those perspectives. Methods of defiance/subversion/protest are presented here as well as imperial pomp and ceremony, and questions are raised about what was real and what was not in how the empire likes to portray itself. Individuality within a perceived monolithic culture is a theme carried on from the last paper in section two, as the papers presented here consider how a person could become a member of a wider collective while also protecting their individual expression. Through focus on the interplay between imperial and individual identities, papers in this section echo the need to critically engage with conceptions of the other in Roman past.

Allason-Jones's 'Sculpture from Old Carlisle, Cumbria, and what it tells us about life in the Hinterland of Hadrian's Wall' shows us what may be possible from the re-analysis of a collection of sculptured stones from a single site in postulating new and informed narratives. Old Carlisle was a small fort, and it remains largely buried and unexplored by archaeological investigation. However, it has produced a varied number of interesting altars, inscriptions and sculptured stones. From these Allason-Jones offers a unique insight into the religious and daily life at a frontier fort, its cosmopolitan make-up, including the evidence for what may have been local people. Allason-Jones also offers us a glimpse into the possibility that some of those locals may have been reluctant participants in all aspects of Roman life, leaving behind the possible traces of small acts of resistance.

Simon James' long-term research into the site of Dura-Europos is the direct inspiration for the next contribution to the volume by Breeze, Flügel and Graafstal which opens with a discussion on the depiction of Julius Terentius, the commander of the *Cohors XXX Palmyrenorum* in a wall painting from the site. 'Setting the frame. Further thoughts on the suovetaurilia scene on the Bridgeness Distance Slab.' takes us from one end of the empire to another, from Dura-Europos to the Antonine Wall, and discusses in detail the scene on the Bridgeness Distance Slab. The paper explores where and how the sacrifice depicted may have taken place in the local landscape. The monumental stone borrows artistically from a pool of established imagery, and the paper considers if this stone helps us unravel the sequence of events and who was present at the ceremony to celebrate the construction of the Wall.

'Tracing the Life of a Dipinto: A revision of the Iarhibol Dipinto from the military clerical office in Dura-Europos' by Dirven also asks us to consider the importance of thinking beyond the obvious and highlights the vital contribution of archival work to further archaeological understanding. The interpretation of the Iarhibol-dipinto, depicting Iarhibol, a Roman officer and a horseman, from room W14 in the former courtyard of the temple of Azzanathkona at Dura-Europos is important for many reasons, not least the arguments surrounding the late conquest and re-occupation of the site by Sasanians in 253-5 CE. Using a mixture of evidence which includes new archival discoveries, Driven reassesses this information and its potential for representing a historic moment for those present at the site.

In 'Effluvia of Empire: Sanitation and the Roman Army' Esmonde Cleary reminds us of a subject that is often ignored or provided as an aspect of fun for children visiting Roman sites but was fundamental to the lived experiences of ancient lives. After taking Simon James at his word to be as emphatic about the need to engage with the day-to-day realities of being a Roman soldier or part of a wider Roman military Society, Esmonde Cleary takes, 'a bottom-up approach' to the subject at hand. He considers to what extent sanitation and toilet practice was normalised within individual units and if the induction into these norms was a part of the creation of soldierly identity, which included the remoulding of one's personal habits and identity into a corporate entity. The paper discusses the uncomfortable issue around the impact of an unsanitary army as a vector of diseases in the empire as well as how both ancient and modern perceptions of waste and waste management have influenced its study in scholarly debate.

***Part 4. Cultural relativism and belonging on the frontiers***

From globalisation to glocalisation, community to discrepant identities. This chapter considers how far we allow our identities to be subsumed into a collective yet retain who we are. It also considers what may have changed with age and how a sense of belonging could be portrayed in life and be carried over into the afterlife. The chapters in this section tackle the question of how people on the frontiers defined who, and by which processes was defined as the other, and trace the ways in which notions of community and group identity created a sense of inside-ness.

In 'The Roman Military on the Syrian Euphrates: Small Finds in Roman Global Worlds', by Baird fits into the category of community and identity as it questions the depth to which the 'imperial monolith of the military has been contrasted materially, as well as in lived experience, with civil communities.' Specifically, the paper explores some of the range of entanglements in the Roman military through a contextual approach to military material culture. Instead of merely identifying Roman military objects from their form or type, such as painted shields, or copper-alloy belt buckles, this paper takes a holistic view of the assemblages from Roman military contexts. By doing so, it sees more than just Roman soldiers in those spaces. Baird rightly questions what constituted a military space in the same way that James himself enquired 'what constitutes a military artefact?' (James 2004, 6). By objectifying military contexts at Dura-Europos Baird explores artefacts that characterised local and regional products.

Combatant men are the study and focus for van Driel-Murray, who considers 'The Men of Dura-Europos: a demographic profile of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*.' She takes inspiration from the work of Simon James at Dura-Europos in examining the Roman soldier as an individual and as a part of his wider community. In particular, the detailed and forensic analysis of the papyrus *P. Dur 100*, a roster of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, drawn up in 219 CE, is the basis of a wider discussion on unit strengths, recruitment and the age and length of service, through to the age of retirement, discharge or death. The projected age profile of a cohort in 219 CE is particularly revealing as it shows the range of between 20 to 47 years for the men serving but a particular spike for those in their early 20's and mid 30's with few at the top and bottom of the age range. It appears that relatively few men would see their 25 years of service before either death or discharge, highlighting the challenges that the military faced with recruitment and retention on their frontier postings.

Allison takes us back to material culture with her paper 'Ceramics and social practice on Roman military sites.' Here she uses the ceramic assemblages at military sites to gain greater understanding of socio-cultural practices from within those contexts. Allison brings together aspects of her previous work on gendered and social practices at Roman military sites in Germany with her current research into *terra sigillata*. She considers ceramics within the framework of gendered practice, looking beyond the normal tropes associated with production and trade and questions the belief that well-made pots were made by men and that poorer, more crudely made ceramic vessels by women. Here she draws on parallels to the brick industry outside Rome which has produced several female names on stamps, dating from the first to third centuries CE. The paper concludes that we cannot be certain that those forms of labour explored here were specifically gendered tasks.

Finally, Rogers focuses on the topic of belonging from the context of 'dehumanisation' associated with those excluded from frontiers or crossing them. Rogers explores these themes focusing on Hadrian's Wall while also providing a reflection on the development of theory in Roman Frontier studies. By examining dehumanization, the article draws on posthumanism, and materialism to highlight how people, materials, and landscapes interacted within these zones.

***Part 5. Relativism and cultures of violence***

The edge of the empire and its zones of influence could lend themselves to moments or acts of extreme violence. However, it was not just the clash of cultures or the redefining of spaces and places that may have made this more probable here than in other parts of the empire. This chapter includes discussions on the potential for the normalisation of violence, and how appearance and dress were symbols of complex identities. In section 5 we also consider the interpersonal relationships and stresses of life in a frontier zone. A space in which pressure and tension could boil over and be intensified, not only at times of large-scale conflict but also in the so-called quieter moments of the daily routine. The papers in this chapter touch on the more difficult aspects of the legacy of cultural relativism and its translation into questions of ethics, and understanding past cultures of violence in their rightful contexts.

In his paper 'Which Side Does Sir Dress?' Bishop challenges 'the narrative has developed' where it has been accepted that Roman soldiers, except for centurions, wore their swords on the right hip in the early Principate. Before switching to the left-hip, the *spatha* became the main infantry weapon in the second century CE. Bishop explores the inconsistencies which show that left hip suspension was displayed well before the Antonine period, and that the reasons for this may have been artistic, cultural or the oversimplification of a much more complex reality. He questions whether the Roman army was so dogmatic and if we should follow suit in our interpretations, exploring the 'untidier corners of the Roman military mind'. This paper raises questions about our modern preoccupation to seek order where none may have been present and by doing so completely misunderstand what once took place.

In 'Differentiation and Conflict on the Northern Frontier' Meyer discusses the power dynamic and political relationship between Rome and Britain in the first and early second centuries CE by using a range of evidence including the Vindolanda writing tablets. He explores the significance of the *Britunculi* letter which

refers to the 'wretched Britons' as evidence that the Romans looked down on local recruits in this period. Antagonism between soldiers and civilians is also a theme of the paper, showing the different way 'men from overseas' were treated when compared to local Britons. The paper concludes that although the archaeology of conflict is relatively elusive, the documentary record of Roman Britain can offer insight into daily, small-scale and personal frictions between any number of groups and that conflict appears, if you look for it, on every level from individual to the national.

The final paper of this volume, entitled 'The enemy you know. Evidence for complex relationships and interpersonal conflict on the northern frontier' by Birley focuses on the site of Vindolanda and uses a range of material to explore the complex and dangerous situations for both locals and occupying Roman forces. Birley notes, like Meyer before him, that 'arguments, complaints, and the implication of violence and punishment are present in the ancient texts of the Vindolanda writing tablets.' Birley also examines what the conditions for violence, excessive drinking, tensions, living conditions and the constant threat on mental health would have had on various groups within the military community and those who came up against it. From 'Britunculli to brother' the local versus Roman dynamic is explored as are themes of collaboration, shelter and murder on Hadrian's Wall with a reassessment of the Housesteads and Vindolanda murders in their respective contexts. The complex and interchangeable nature of daily life and interpersonal conflict on the northern frontier of Roman Britain left its mark as much upon the landscape as the monuments in stone themselves.

## Conclusions

Altogether, the volume presents a series of varied papers responding to the theme of the volume through diverse case studies and arguments based on evidence from all parts of the Roman Empire, from Scotland to North Africa, and from present day territories of Spain to the vestiges of Dura-Europos and the outposts in the Red Sea. The chapters speak to the key five themes within the current state of research in the field, whose current conceptualisations owe their origin to the cultural relativist tradition. The editors of this volume hope that the papers within it will stimulate debate on the value of taking new approaches to the evidence presented. The use of cultural relativism can provide a more open framework for debate and discourse, allowing the room required for differing points of view to be considered beside one another. We are indebted to the contributors of the volume who have shared their knowledge, passion and expertise with a common goal in mind, to celebrate the impact of Simon James on the field of archaeological research and discourse.

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# Part 1

# Roman Frontiers Repositioned

# The Demise of Roman Frontier Studies?

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**Introduction**

Premature announcements of the death of a celebrity occur from time to time, often to the deep chagrin of the over-eager obituarist. The many metres of books on Roman frontiers and the ever-popular *limes* congresses can certainly be read as evidence of a continuing strong pulse in this branch of Roman studies. I may thus invite the derision of Roman army afficionados by dint of my title advancing the preposterous idea that the end of Roman frontier studies is imminent. My (emeritus) colleague and friend Simon James is certainly someone who can be counted among Roman army enthusiasts – the replica arms and armour that used to decorate his office, his 'hanging out' with the Ermine Street Guard and writing an entire book about the Roman sword are all tell-tale signs (James 2011). In his own work, of course, he has critiqued the traditional agendas of the discipline and the extent to which they need reform (James 2002). I thus hope he will see beyond my mischievous intent in offering this provocation piece to this volume in his honour and enjoy engaging with the argument in person when next we meet.

There has been a lot of recent media attention relating to a survey suggesting that the average (Western) male thinks about the Romans rather a lot (for example, The Guardian 2023; The Washington Post 2023). As a Roman archaeologist, I know there are many reasons for thinking about Rome, but I suspect what underpins this layman phenomenon is above all an unhealthy macho fascination with the Roman military. In support of this, I remember the occasion, while teaching at University of Michigan, that I offered a course on the Roman Army and turned up for the first class to find 29 young men with buzz cuts and a single woman in the room (they proved a fascinating and enthusiastic class, though half of them were mobilised for the First Gulf War half-way through the semester...).

By extension, Roman frontier studies play to a similar audience. As a student and young researcher, I was somewhat obsessed by Roman frontiers, and I avidly consumed the detailed knowledge that had been accumulated about their evolution and infrastructure. Eventually my focus of interest broadened out, though I still retain a lot of knowledge from that time. I also came to realise that the agendas of study in Roman archaeology reflected the modern colonial underpinnings of the discipline and needed updating. A question arising from this is at what point does such a close and emotional intellectual association skew public and scholarly perceptions of the Roman empire and perpetuate outmoded ideas about impacts? One warning sign is the extent to which right wing groups (including the US Proud Boys) have adopted Roman insignia, slogans and militaristic justifications of aggression and white supremacy agitation. A different sort of alarm signal concerns the singular antipathy for the Roman army that one encounters across the Islamic countries that now take up most of the east and southern sectors of the Roman empire. In those regions the Roman army is readily equated with modern colonial armies (and, by extension, also with the occupying Israeli Defence Force in Palestine). This dichotomous relationship with the Roman army – from near adulation in the West to detestation in the East/South – ought to be deeply perturbing to us as disciplinary practitioners in a world where decolonising agendas are rapidly gaining pace. I shall return to this below.

In this short contribution, I want to explore whether the over-emphasis of the *idea* of Roman frontiers could be construed in the 21st century as a huge intellectual misstep within the discipline of Classical Studies? Is it a misconception that impedes our understanding of what the Roman army was for and what it did? I shall unpack some of the colonialist baggage of traditional approaches. I then go on to explain how I have tried to construct a different sort of narrative structure in a recent study of the North African evidence. In that book I experimented with removing the word 'frontier' from the discourse entirely and did not especially miss it. Finally, I shall reflect on the potential consequences for the discipline of not addressing the perceived weaknesses of traditional approaches, with their overt genesis in the modern colonial period and in colonialist ideology.

At the outset, I also need to acknowledge that as my own work has evolved out of the tradition that I am now questioning, interested readers going back to my earlier works will find plenty of examples of the loose terminology and conceptual ambiguity that this contribution seeks to challenge. I do not wish to denigrate the scholarly achievements of traditional work on the Roman military, which are considerable and provide incredible insights into the workings of an ancient army. However, it is a fair criticism to say that some of the underpinning agendas remain relatively

little changed since the modern colonial era in which they evolved (James 2002) and this may impact the long-term health of the discipline if not addressed. Questioning long-held assumptions, changing perspectives and broadening the agenda will also positively enhance and refresh research on the Roman empire and its impacts.

**What is a frontier?**

The modern connotations of a frontier generally imply a border that separates inside from outside (of both territory and peoples). Typically, a state defends its frontiers against its neighbours, whether through latent evocations of power or in direct confrontations (on the development of ideas about frontiers, see the interesting historiographical review in Whittaker 1994, 1-9). In many periods of history, states have strategically located forces in relation to key border locations often exploiting natural features to accentuate the military purpose – mountain passes, river crossings, seaports, deserts. Frontiers are not just military lines, of course, they also serve as places where customs and taxation may be levied and as control points for human migration. Frontiers can be more or less firmly defined in geographical terms – indeed the precise drawing of boundaries is the prime cause of much inter-state contestation down the ages. Frontier and Border Studies more generally have become a huge disciplinary area, with much discussion about the way that ideas about frontiers and frontier mentalities actually drive inter-state competition and the expansion of states (for good bibliographical overview and excellent discussion of how Roman studies might engage with Border Studies, see Gardner 2022; 2024). Borderlands are very ambiguous cultural spaces, often marked by distinct forms of hybridity, and are central to studies of colonial systems (Naum 2010, on colonial context of frontiers and the hybrid 'Third Space').

**The differences between states and empires: inside/outside**

But are empires different in the way they construe frontiers? Unlike a nation state, where the territory is generally perceived as contingent with the core population's sense of national identity, empires occupy wider territories without the consent of subject populations (on imperialism and the Roman empire, see Mattingly 2011, 3-22). The limits of empire may be defined in relation to neighbouring peoples (perhaps even rival empires), but much of the military mission of an empire is directed to holding on to the territory acquired and enabling the empire to extract revenue and resources vital to the imperial mission (Mattingly 2011, 125-45). Garrisons are thus not necessarily solely located to defend the empire against external rivals, though where powerful neighbours or potent threats exist, we can logically expect border dispositions to reflect that reality. Smaller scale expanding states follow some of this sort of patterning too in relation to annexed territories, but the imperative of resourcing an imperial core from its subject territories creates a different overall dynamic. The point I want to emphasise is that empires tend to have a greater priority on maintenance of *internal security* than smaller scale states, where defence against (or intimidation of) *external* neighbours may be the more recurrent concern. The term 'frontier' perhaps focuses us too much on what divided colonial territory from lands/peoples beyond and makes those external relations all important, rather than also considering the internal complexities of life alongside garrisons. The long-term military history of Imperial conquest, territorial occupation, administration and defence is inherently complicated across geographically varied theatres from metropolitan core to frontier outpost. An exaggerated focus on imperial frontiers will miss much of this. Imagine trying to make sense of the story of the British Raj solely from the optic of the arrangements of its North-Western garrison deployment in the Kyber Pass...

**Roman frontiers**

It is worth reflection about where the idea of the Roman frontier first came from. The Romans used a number of terms to describe the limits of empire (Breeze 2011, 5-6): *fines*, *limes* (land), *ripa* (river) and in the age of Augustus even played with the conceit of an empire without limits (Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.278-79: *imperium sine fine*). In their interstate relations Rome and her neighbours needed to have a pretty clear understanding of where Roman territory ended and that of others commenced (so that border transgressions that could trigger warfare were readily identifiable as such). However, in practice, having active disagreements on territorial limits generally suited Rome during her more expansionist phases. Roman ideas about frontiers changed considerably over time. When expansion slowed, closer demarcation of borders became more of a priority. It was logical that territorial limits often coincided with a hard to miss natural feature like a mountain range or a major river. Over time, the limits of empire became rather more clearly marked in the landscape, not least because of the incremental growth of border infrastructure and garrison settlements.

The Roman sources are surprisingly scanty in relation to frontiers (see discussion in Breeze 2011, 7, 14-29, where much of what he assembles relate to generalised ideas about limits of empire or to specific military installations rather than frontiers per se; cf also Whittaker 1994, 10-59). We need to be careful, though, about taking

too literally the statement of the 4th-century *Historia Augusta* (*Hadrian* 11.2) that characterised Hadrian's Wall as separating 'Romans from barbarians'. Similarly, in the *Historia Augusta* account of the life of Antoninus Pius (5.4), a new turf wall was built in Scotland 'having driven back the barbarians'. These sentiments are clearly part of a Roman colonial discourse and conjure up images of a world of 'civilised Romans' within the empire's borders under siege from 'barbarian' peoples who lived beyond. This has set the tone for much modern scholarship, where terms like 'barbarian', 'tribe', 'primitive' and 'native' are still recurrently used to characterise the empire's neighbours (Mattingly 2023, 48-70 for general discussion of these ancient and modern colonialist discourses).

It is not my intention here to deny that there were demarcated borders of the Roman empire. The long duration of the Roman empire and its progressive expansion led to many core territories becoming relatively free of garrisons over time and a greater concentration of military forces in the outlying and more recently conquered territories. The northern British walls and the European river frontiers of the Rhine and Danube especially stand out as garrison lines at the edge of empire. However, it seems to me that there is more to the deployment than a simple frontier enforcement and in the rest of this contribution I explore whether in conceptualising Roman military deployment entirely within a 'frontier' narrative – with distinct colonialist underpinnings (ancient and modern) – we are effectively perpetuating a myth-representation of the empire's ultimate purpose in its garrison arrangements.

## The origins of Roman frontier studies

Studies of the Roman army are almost inseparable from the idea of the frontier. On the other hand, there is a bit of a paradox that the violent arm of Roman imperialism – whose viciousness and predatory behaviour is well attested in our ancient sources (Fernández-Götz *et al.* 2020; Mattingly 2011, 22-26) – has been somewhat sanitised and made palatable as a subject of study through the traditional focus on Rome's frontiers.

A key moment in the development of Roman Frontier Studies as a sub-discipline was the first international *limes* congress in 1949, though in truth that meeting built on a long tradition of work, especially on Hadrian's Wall and the German frontiers (see Breeze *et al.* 2022 for a detailed review of the *limes* congresses). The linear barriers of Britain and Germany certainly tick many boxes relating to modern expectations of what frontiers should look like (Breeze 2022; 2023a; Thiel *et al.* 2022). The dominance of the Roman frontier narrative in European and North American Classical Studies continues today, with a focus on extending the extent and number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites based on sectors of Roman *limes* (Breeze and Jilek 2008; Ployer *et al.* 2019). Only rarely have scholars consciously set out to disrupt the traditional Romano-centric focus of study of these works (see for example Hingley 2012, for a strikingly different diachronic approach to Hadrian's Wall).

The theoretical work of Edward Luttwak (1976) on the evolution of the Roman frontier was very influential for explaining how Rome changed during the 1st century BC to the 2nd century AD from being a largely hegemonic empire to an essentially territorial empire with defined frontiers. In a third phase, Luttwak argued that Late Roman frontiers became increasingly based on ideas of defence in depth, due to the ability of enemies to now penetrate deep into imperial territory, whether Germanic groups over the Rhine and Danube or Persians in the East. There has been ongoing critique of points of detail within Luttwak's models (see for instance Isaac 1992; Whittaker 1994), but less so the overall direction of the argument that once Rome had pacified her provincial territories, the main military effort was focused on protection against external threats.

The dominance of the idea of the frontier in Roman army studies is overwhelming, but the tradition of study has tended to sometimes be a bit descriptive in focus, producing extended catalogues of military infrastructure if you like. There are excellent surveys of the empire as a whole (see Breeze 2011; Reddé 2014), though these are generally focused on the infrastructure and material practices and culture of the garrisons, rather than wider socio-economic impacts. The series of short studies of different frontier sectors, under the leadership of David Breeze is another case in point. While some of these books deal with regions where the 'frontier' took a very linear form – as on the Rhine (Thiel *et al.* 2022; Graafstal *et al.* 2018) and Danube (Jilek 2009; Schwarcz and Ployer 2023), many titles in this series in fact emphasise the *non-linear* nature of the 'frontier' arrangements and the great depth of the garrisoned territory, as in Dacia (Marcu and Cupcea 2022), North Africa (Mattingly *et al.* 2013), Syria and the East (Abudanah *et al.* 2022). The Saxon Shore on both sides of the English Channel was an unusual 'frontier' due to its focus on maritime threats, but its elaboration was accompanied by profound rural changes in its inland hinterland (Wilmott *et al.* 2022). In some cases, it is clear that the long-term garrison related to specific resource exploitation within the provinces, as in the case of agricultural produce, metals or decorative stone from Egypt (Reddé 2022). Spain lacks a title in the Frontiers series, but with the base of a legion in its main mining district clearly falls into this same category. There are also other large territories

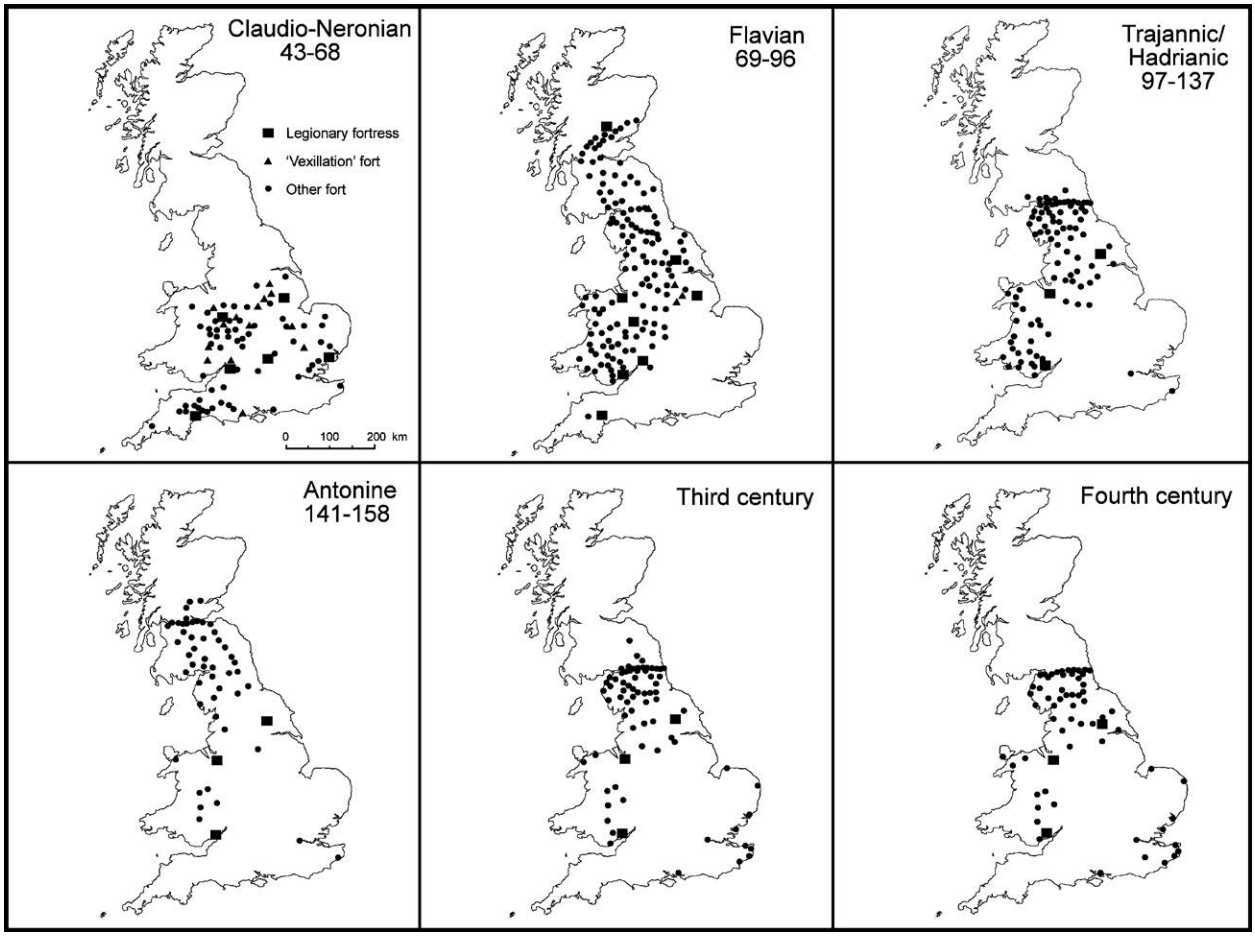


Figure 1. The overall distribution and density of the Roman garrison in Britain over 350 years is not best explained by a 'frontier narrative' relating it to external threats. An alternative is to view substantial parts of the provincial territory as long-maintained security zones (from Mattingly 2006, 133).

included in the Frontiers series where the garrison deployment constituted long-term occupation, with a focus on internal security as much as external threat, as in the case of Wales (Guest 2022) or Northern Britain south of Hadrian's Wall (Breeze 2023b). A brief quote on the sustained garrison presence in northern Britain illustrates the potential for an approach focused on the frontier mentality to underestimate the potential for significant impacts on provincial subjects:

> This pattern was repeated over the centuries. For the whole period from the Roman occupation of northern England in the early 70s until its final days in about 410 Roman forts studded the landscape and their occupants sought to protect their fellow provincials. It might be asked if the people of northern England were restless, causing the Romans to retain large forces in the island, but we have no evidence for this. (Breeze 2023b, 46-47)

As Breeze has also commented 'there is no such creature as a typical Roman frontier' (2011, 5), but one could make a case in some of the instances mentioned above that these were not really frontiers at all, but rather heavily garrisoned sectors of the imperial territory. A quick look at where the Roman legions were based in the second century CE (Reddé 2014, 6), reveals that about half were some distance (50 km or more) from the limits of Roman territory, and some considerably more than that, placed where they were better positioned to respond to both internal unrest and external threats.

The foregrounding of the idea of frontiers is also apparent in relation to current thinking about boundaries between Roman provinces (della Casa and Deschler-Erb 2016), but here again the expectation seems to be that the differences evident in material culture will reflect 'internal frontiers'. Several papers in that volume in fact indicate divergence between the Roman military community and civil populations within provinces that were, in my view, the consequence of prolonged occupation.

There is a clear risk of this obsession with Roman frontiers (especially when this is linked to a dualistic

view of outside = 'enemies' and inside = 'Romans') that it may misconstrue the nature of Roman military activity within the empire. The traditional way that the frontier narrative is constructed also tends to align Western scholars with a Roman perspective of empire, rationalising the deployment in a manner that highlights defence over the necessity of maintaining occupation and what that entailed in relation to subject populations. How can we align such a tradition of study with popular opinion in North Africa and the Levant that the Roman soldiers were the external enemy who came into those lands and occupied and oppressed? There is a very clear point of tension in the plans eventually to create a single unified World Heritage Site combining all the Roman frontiers, in that the movement is essentially focused on European provinces and the ambivalence of non-European scholars and crucially governments is a real stumbling block (Ployer *et al.* 2019, 15-114). The point about occupation, especially by a militarily dominant power, is that beyond a certain point conventional armed resistance is difficult to sustain. But just because we do not hear about major revolts, it does not mean that oppression and passive forms of resistance did not continue (Mattingly 2011; 2024). As I have argued in *Imperial Possession* (2006, 87-165) the intensity and long drawn-out nature of the military occupation of Britain profoundly impacted its experience of Roman rule (see Figure 1).

## Approaching frontiers in Africa under Rome

In North Africa, the recognition of the depth of the frontier zone and of the range of impacts that arose from the military deployment is vital for the proper understanding of the military community in North Africa. For this reason, in my recent book on Africa in the Roman Empire (2023, 219-322), I used the terminology of 'security zones' in place of 'frontiers' (2023, 245-46, for explicit discussion of security as a term for the deployment pattern).

The Roman military deployments in North Africa (Figure 2) need to be considered as a series of separate security zones, rather than as a single system (Guédon 2018a; Mattingly *et al.* 2013; Reddé 2014, 121-34). In part this reflects the provincial structures, but it also relates to the radically varied topographic setting, from the mountains of *Mauretania* to the desert margins of *Numidia* and *Tripolitana*. Desert borders, by their very nature, present some rather different characteristics and challenges, often best understood from a diachronic perspective (Guédon 2018b; 2020;

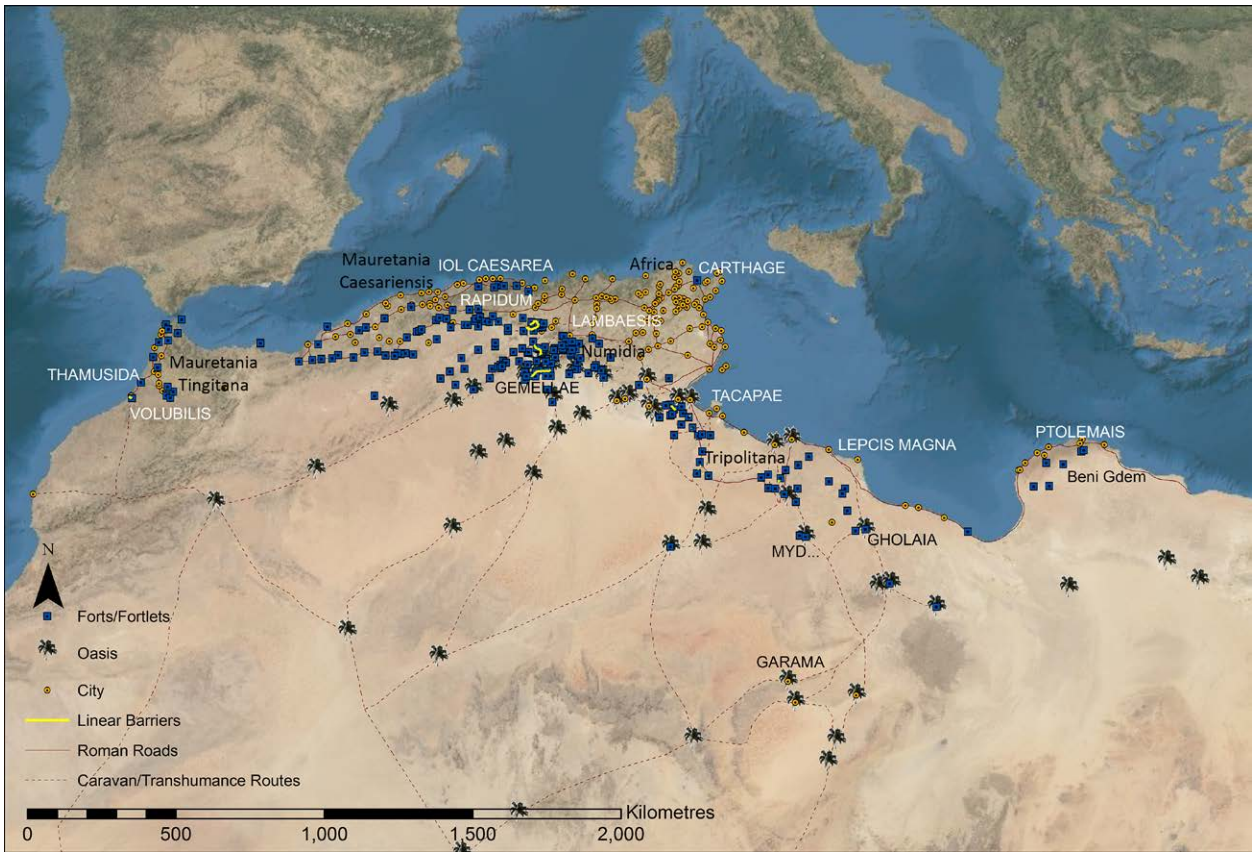


Figure 2. Roman military installations of multiple periods in North Africa, showing the depth of the security zones in most provinces (revised from Mattingly 2023, 251).

Mattingly 2023, 253-55). In the past the Sahara has tended to be presented as a vast empty space inhabited by bands of bellicose nomads, requiring a relatively low density but widely spread garrison in response. More recent work has shown the existence of substantial oasis communities in the northern Sahara, creating rather more complex sets of relations between Rome and her desert neighbours. As in many desert areas, control of water sources and the key access routes was crucial. The security zones of *Numidia* and *Tripolitana* were extremely deep – a traveller might take a week or more to pass through. This has sometimes been explained as relating to the transhumance range of external pastoral peoples between the northern Sahara and the developed agricultural zone, but it also clearly related to Roman supervision of indigenous population groups known as Gaetuli and Mauri living at all times within the security zones. The Mauretanian provinces were highly militarised in their entirety, rather than neatly divisible into civil and military zones. Overall, the garrison strength in North Africa was lower than in the European and Eastern provinces and the large territories under effective military supervision or oversight must have presented challenges both for the Roman administration and local communities. The flashpoints were not limited to contact with external peoples, a high proportion of recorded revolts and unrest in the African provinces occurred within provincial territory (Mattingly 2023, 277-79).

North Africa has revealed evidence of several linear barriers, though these are in general poorly investigated and imprecisely dated. Most notably, their location does not seem to have marked the limits of Roman territory, but rather their positioning was at convenient points for the control of movement through the security zones (Mattingly 2023, 255-62). The linear barriers made it easier to regulate movements between a more extensive cultivated zone and pre-desert pastures, to supervise labour migrants, to tax pastoral production and to exact customs dues on the trade with the oases and more distant parts of the trans-Saharan zone. The involvement of the garrison in collection of customs and in other fiscal roles is indicated by a number of pieces of evidence from Africa. The key point I want to make here is that the Roman army was not making distinctions here between those who were subjects of Rome and those who were considered external to the empire.

## Some final reflections

So, do agendas of Roman frontier studies remain fit for purpose? I certainly believe study of Rome's military engagements with its empire and beyond should remain a central feature of Roman history and archaeology, but I also think that debate can be reinvigorated by asking different questions and from more varied perspectives. My replacement of the term 'frontier' with 'security zone' has the merit of emphasising that military control and effort was directed both internally and externally in the outlying provinces, where most troops tended to be concentrated. More thought could be given to the local experience of the Roman army by civilian populations in the provinces. As suggested by one of the editors of this volume on reading my draft, it might in fact be apposite to consider that the presence of the garrisons contributed to these remaining 'insecure' zones – with long-term 'security' an elusive state.

I have argued in my studies of Britain (2006, 166-224) and Africa in the Roman empire (2023, 290-322) that the military community comprised not only the soldiery but also certain groups of civilians whose lives were closely affiliated with the garrison settlements and their supply (see also in this line of argument, James 1999; 2014; Goldsworthy and Haynes 1999). The military community thus defined constructed its identity and social behaviours in very different ways from the local populations of the security zones. This self-interested cultural behaviour worked against conventional notions of integration under the now outmoded Romanization model (Mattingly 2024). Although there was some cultural convergence over the long duration of the Roman provinces, my point is that it suited the army to accentuate its aura of difference from ordinary people within the security zone. And many local people for prolonged periods will have felt to some degree culturally excluded from (and plausibly oppressed by) the local forces of occupation (as emphasised by the important study of Given 2004; cf. also Moll 2023). To get a more rounded picture, the power dynamics of negotiating passage through security checkpoints, or encounters with military patrols on provincial roads, or military supervision of markets and installations connected with food supply need to be thought about critically, not simply from an organisational Roman perspective, but also from the experiential stance of provincial subjects and visitors from outside the empire.

Understanding the exceptionality of the military community in the provinces is a crucial step to unlocking the complexities of societal change in the security zones of the empire (Wells 1999, for an important example that is still rarely emulated by traditional Roman army specialists in thinking about the border communities). The fascinating complexities are all too apparent in Simon's own work on the Syrian garrison town at Dura (James 2019). The broader agendas of Border Studies offer scope to advance beyond the traditional limits of Roman Frontier Studies

(as outlined by Gardner 2022), but this will be most effectively achieved if the colonialist origins of the latter are properly deconstructed in the process.

This links to a moral question that lurks behind my reflections in this contribution. I have worked extensively in the eastern and the southern provincial landscapes of the Roman empire and my observation of the negative local view of the Romans has encouraged me to re-evaluate the ways I approach Rome. In North Africa and the Middle East, the Roman period is perceived first and foremost as a period of colonial occupation (Mattingly 2011, 43-72). The Roman military infrastructure is for the most part viewed with distaste and suspicion, being readily associated with the tools of more recent oppression, extending interestingly to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. How can we promote the study of this past in a less colonialist manner, that does not alienate or exclude a significant part of the population of the former Roman empire?

We should also reflect on how the Roman empire is viewed by people who come from formerly colonised countries (or oppressed minorities) worldwide and encounter a rather anodyne and rose-tinted view of colonialism in the education systems in classrooms in global Britain and France (Sanghera 2021). To argue for change in our approaches to teaching the Roman empire is not simple wokery, but a necessity for our discipline to move with the times we live in, so as to open new questions and insights on the ancient world and to maintain the relevance and currency of Roman studies. It is one thing for individual men (or women) to hold unreconstructed attitudes to empire in their private musings about Rome (whether several times a week as the newspaper reports suggested or less frequently), but surely it is unacceptable that our education systems and public engagement activities still present the experience of ancient empire in such biased and misconceived terms.

Perhaps the ultimate lesson to draw from this is that frontiers, like retirement perhaps, can mark a beginning of something new, not a terminus.

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# Frontiers and the Roman Empire: A Comparative Perspective

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Roman military communities and the frontier regions in which their members lived played a fundamental role in shaping the cultural, economic, and political trajectory of the Empire over the long-term. The significance of Simon James's work on these aspects of Roman archaeology cannot be understated, both in terms of understanding the dynamics of these communities in the past and promoting the integration of their study with other agendas in research into the Roman world in the present. In this paper, I hope to add some further dimensions to the interpretation of Roman borderlands through comparative work in Border Studies, revitalising an established tradition of placing the boundaries of the Roman Empire in a wider historical and geographical context. Roman frontiers are quite diverse within themselves, and certainly combine unique features when compared with other imperial or national border regions, but that doesn't mean that insights cannot be gleaned from generalising approaches to the kinds of social processes and practices which tend to make borderlands highly dynamic and creative, if also contentious and sometimes violent arenas. Aspects of the Spanish imperial frontier in North America, as forerunner of today's prominent US/Mexico boundary, will be considered to see what light both differences and similarities can shed on Roman frontiers in the north-west Roman Empire, and their wider impact on the changing complexion of Roman society.

## Introduction: frontiers, borderlands, and the past

Border zones today are sometimes dangerous and often dynamic. They might be militarised zones of actual or pending violence, or they might just be perceived – often by people living far away from them – as vulnerable to undesirable incursions. At the same time, and sometimes in the same places, they might be very routinely crossed as part of everyday life, or, in the longer term, they might be locations for the mixing of cultural traditions. This is the paradox of borders (cf. Vulliamy 2011: xxxi), and the reason that they are so interesting, and important to understand. The 21st century, so far, has seen a dramatic resurgence in the imposition and fortification of borders, and in the rhetoric of exclusion, particularly in the many countries witnessing a rise in right-wing populism (e.g. Scott 2020). This stands in stark contrast to the – admittedly mainly academic – talk of moves towards a 'borderless world' in the 1990s (Ohmae 1990). While there are still voices arguing for the radical reconfiguration of political geography to remove or re-orient borders (e.g. Bradley and De Noronha 2022; Niven 2019), it seems that there are substantial portions of the electorate in many countries who find them necessary or reassuring, at the same time – indeed, perhaps, because – their lives continue to be shaped by the processes of globalisation.

This situation has fuelled the expansion of inter-disciplinary scholarship on borders, with a proliferation of literature and conferences on the topic of 'Border Studies', on which more below. A crucial question which this developing field considers to some extent (e.g. O'Dowd 2010), but to which archaeologists are perhaps well-placed to contribute, concerns the historicity of this tension between border-crossing and border-making. Is there a basic human characteristic at play here, a tension between connection and isolation, and perhaps evident at a range of scales, and, if so, how does it vary cross-culturally? Much Border Studies scholarship is concerned with the study of contemporary or recent boundaries, understandably for a field drawing mainly on political science, geography, international relations, anthropology and the like. Only a deeper temporal perspective, however, can address these questions of the commonalities and variations across a range of societies, and therefore offer broader insights that might make a difference to some of today's most contentious debates.

This means thinking about borders as not just between modern nation-states, but other kinds of political entities, and at different scales, from the macro level of inter-regional frontiers that we are familiar with in Roman studies, down to more regional, local, and even personal boundaries. Archaeologists have been engaging with such questions, both before and subsequent to the growth of Border Studies (e.g. Feuer 2016; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995; Mullin (ed.) 2011), but Roman archaeology is particularly well-poised to pursue a close engagement with this developing field of scholarship (cf. Boozer 2013; Gardner 2022; Hanscam and Buchanan 2023; Hingley 2018). For one thing, it is a natural turn to take following the recent interest in globalisation in Roman archaeology, since – as discussed above – the 're-bordering' of the contemporary world is in part a reaction to globalisation, and interpretation of bordering practices is a counter-balance to the emphasis on networks and connectivity in globalisation theory (Bude and Dürrschmidt 2010; cf. Hingley 2005;

Pitts and Versluys (eds) 2014). Furthermore, and almost needless to say, study of Roman frontiers is very well-developed, albeit with various gaps and a weight of traditional conceptual baggage that Simon James has done a great deal to illuminate (e.g. 2002; cf. Breeze 2018). Crucially, of course, in recent years and again with many contributions from Simon, study of the frontier zones, and the military communities therein, has moved forward substantially and in exactly the right direction to converge with the kinds of interests prevalent in Border Studies – as will be discussed in the next section.

Finally, the way in which analysis of borders and their long-term, society-wide effects connects boundary zones to the heart of any society also offers a way of bridging the traditional divide in Roman studies between the 'classical' archaeology of the core of the Empire and the 'provincial' archaeology of the regions closer to the frontiers, as well as to the recent resurgence of interest in cross-frontier interaction (Breeze 2018; Gardner 2022; González Sánchez and Guglielmi (eds) 2017). Developing a programme of research to explicitly engage with Border Studies thus promises to be beneficial in both directions, and to make the most of a long-standing strength of Roman archaeology to address very contemporary problems. To begin outlining such a programme, we need to consider, albeit briefly, the current state of Roman frontier studies.

## Roman frontiers today

The emergence and early development of *limesforschung* has been well-documented in previous work by Simon James and others, and space is too limited to recapitulate those stages in detail here (cf. James 2002; Breeze 2018; Gardner 2024). Suffice it to say, for a long period of the 19th and 20th centuries, scholarship on Roman frontiers was dominated by traditional approaches which had strengths, in the systematic and empirical nature of much research, but also weaknesses. These latter were particularly embedded in biases towards certain types of evidence and certain types of past interactions, and adherence to a militaristic version of the common identification between modern scholars and the Romans as having kindred interests. As in other domains of Roman archaeology, gradual change from the 1980s loosened some of these strictures, and encouraged debate about the multi-faceted experiences of people in frontier regions. While its proposals are still controversial, some of this movement can be attributed to the debate surrounding Edward Luttwak's book (1976) on Roman 'grand strategy', which proposed different models of frontier organisation (see e.g. Isaac 1993). In parallel, work by Stephen Dyson (1985) and C.R. Whittaker (1994) explored the impact of frontier expansion on Roman society and the economic and cultural dynamics of frontier regions, respectively. At the same sort of time, Peter Wells (1980) and Hugh Elton (1996), among others, explored cultural interactions in frontier zones, transcending the military and political boundaries. Together, these developments in scholarship – alongside the continuing, and evolving, detailed studies of diverse frontier regions represented at the regular *Limeskongressen*, and also those published in the *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* WHS series (e.g. Breeze *et al.* 2022; Hodgson *et al.* (eds) 2017; cf. Breeze 2018) – have ushered in a transformation in understanding of Roman frontier regions. Rather than the simple militarised lines of traditional scholarship, the zonality, fluidity, interactivity, and – above all – the complexity of Roman frontier regions has become ever more conceptually established over the last thirty years. New investigations of sites – military and non-military – are only adding to that picture (e.g. Casana *et al.* 2023). As we will see, this situation presents a very natural alignment with the concerns of Border Studies scholarship.

Alongside these broad developments in understanding frontier landscapes and regions, on both sides of the Roman 'border', there have also been many important innovations in study of the military communities which made up the major extension of state authority in such areas. This is a parallel shift to the foregoing understandings of the frontiers, and similarly builds upon new theory and new data, including particularly artefact analyses and, in the current century, new isotopic methods to look at the mobility of people in military and other contexts. The nature of the Roman military as an institution has come under particular scrutiny, and in the 1990s particular debates were focussed on the degree to which it was a more closed organisation (Pollard 1996), or – at least in some ways – one open to the influences of both culturally diverse recruits across the Empire, and the various non-combatant people who also made up military communities in and around forts and fortresses (Goldsworthy and Haynes (eds) 1999; Haynes 2013; James 1999). The everyday life of these communities, and their composition in terms of different identity groups, particularly along gender and ethnic/geographical lines has been subject to investigation with detailed studies of artefact distributions, structural sequences and, where the relevant remains are available, application of new scientific techniques of osteological analysis (e.g. Allison 2013; Eckardt *et al.* 2015; Gardner 2007). In promoting a more sociological account of the Roman military, by contrast with the earlier 20th century approach much more aligned with straightforward military history, this kind of work has also explored the dynamic nature of the military as a complex and regionalised structure. This was a

structure which changed significantly over the course of Roman history in ways that affected everything from battle tactics and equipment to recruitment sources and veteran settlement patterns and encompassed the role of soldiers in many aspects of frontier life as well as in imperial politics (e.g. Driel-Murray 2002; James 2011; Miller 1996). Together with new approaches to the frontiers as outlined above, this direction of travel has taken Roman military archaeology away from a limited, traditional and narrowly based specialism within Roman studies, towards a field which should be central to understanding Roman imperialism. Moreover, it moves the analysis of one of the most significant components of Roman borderland cultures closer to the kinds of debates happening in Border Studies. It is to an overview of this field that we now turn.

## Border Studies: practices and processes in the borderlands

The roots of what became 'Border Studies' in the 21st century lie in a range of earlier phases of interest in boundaries and borderlands, but the field gained a great deal of momentum after the events of 11th September 2001 and the beginning of the 'War on Terror' which, almost overnight, arrested the de-bordering trends of the previous decade (Bude and Dürrschmidt 2010; Parker and Vaughan-Williams *et al.* 2009). While uneven to begin with, perhaps, the growing trend of the two decades since has been towards more and newer forms of border control, and rhetoric, in many countries around the world, whether fuelled by the economic crisis of the period after 2007, the migration crises after 2015, the rise of populist nationalism most evident from 2016, and then the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020. The point of Border Studies is partly to study these particular events and, from a critical perspective, to understand them and draw lessons for more effective policymaking in future. It is also, though, a rather broader project to place borderlands at the centre of social analysis and seek a much more thoroughgoing comprehension of the place of bordering practices – the making of boundaries – within human social activity, and how these balance against the obvious counterweight tendency towards connectivity (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006; Newman 2006; Scott 2020).

There has been considerable debate about the agenda for Border Studies as, like globalisation theory before it, the disciplinary sources of border theory are diverse, as are some of the positions scholars take on ongoing events. In essence it concerns both the ways in which borders are constructed and crossed, and their wider implications – spatially and temporally – for the societies which they define (Newman 2011; Paasi 1998; 2009; Rumford 2006). There is already an opening for Roman archaeology to engage with this programme, as among those making an effort to take a deep chronological perspective, the Roman frontiers are a well-known early example of border-making. Indeed, there is at the very least a need to promote more up-to-date understanding of these frontiers, as some studies use rather old sources of information (e.g. Nail 2016). Beyond that level of engagement, though, there is much to gain from working the theoretical insights of Border Studies against the current thinking of Roman frontier archaeology.

A couple of major points of articulation can be briefly summarised. A good deal of attention is directed at the everyday interactions, practices and paradoxes of borderland life. Modern borders are of course rarely directly comparable with ancient ones, in terms of the technologies ensuring legitimate passage or preventing illicit crossing, or indeed the state infrastructure which supports these, but there are many issues that converge with questions in Roman frontier research. To take northern Britain as an example, alongside long-standing interest in problems like the patrolling of Hadrian's Wall or the function of its milecastles, recent evidence for landscape clearance north of the wall, and wider settlement patterns in the hinterland on either side, is all relevant to this theme (e.g. Bidwell 2008; Hodgson 2017; cf. Donnan and Wilson 1999). Even quite militarized – and politicized – borders in the modern world retain sufficient permeability to create very significant cultural hybridity and dynamism over time, as the example of the US/Mexico border below will illustrate (e.g. Anzaldúa 1987; Vulliamy 2011). We can see some of these same dynamics in Roman frontier regions, but often have less clarity on the detail of how they were generated.

Simon James' model of the Roman military community (1999; 2001) is certainly a key part of the answer, but we still have work to do to gain a precise understanding of the means, frequency and extent of both legitimate and illicit border-crossing activity in the Hadrian's Wall zone (and how these changed over time). Secondly, Border Studies scholarship often focuses on the deep interaction between border processes and people and the 'core' of the (typically) nation-states that have them in the modern world. Again, there are distinctive features of modern boundaries which are less appropriate to consider in antiquity, such as the diversification of border-crossings opened by rail and air-travel, or the way in which mass media and modern political structures amplify border-policy issues across mainstream public discourse (Haselsberger 2014; Iossifova 2020; Kolossov and Scott 2013). Nonetheless, the constitutive role of the frontiers in Roman economic and social development, and the crucial role of the dynamics of change in frontier provinces in transforming the Roman Empire over time, are

absolutely elements of these same processes. There has long been a need for better integration of 'military' and 'civilian' Roman archaeology, and a Border Studies framework offers a promising way forward with such an agenda (cf. Breeze 2018). To expand on the value of some of these comparisons, a more detailed discussion of the potential insights to be drawn into Roman archaeology – and contributions that can be made back, in return – can be developed in the context of changing frontiers in the southern part of North America.

## Imperial frontiers in North America

There are of course many potential comparative case-studies to juxtapose with Roman frontiers at different stages, some quite close to these in time and space (e.g. Sauer *et al.* 2022), and others more distant (e.g. Gleave *et al.* (eds) 2020). However, one of the most widely studied borders in the contemporary world, which also has a considerable time-depth of development that invites long-term comparisons, is the region which is currently the boundary between the United States of America and Mexico. The status of this border is of course a regular fixture in Western news media, but the escalation in the political stakes surrounding the border regime since Trump's 2016 election campaign is only the latest phase in a complex modern history (e.g. Cantú 2019; Grandin 2019; cf. Hanscam and Buchanan 2023). That history, in turn, follows on from the long period when the region was the northern borderland of the Spanish empire in the Americas. Both phases yield insights in comparison with Rome. To take the more recent period first, it is notable that even a modern international boundary, with a great deal of infrastructure marking it, is ambiguous in its definition.

For one thing, the various barriers which have been erected along the border, on the US side, and particularly since the 1990s, do not always follow the national boundary line. Moreover, there are many zones of administrative, political and commercial border activity, in terms of institutions with direct involvement in both crossing and control, which stretch across the counties and states along the line, in the US and in Mexico. In the US, of course, policing of the border in terms of the remit of immigration authorities is a nation-wide issue (Coleman 2012; Ganster and Collins 2021: 1-13, 188-9; Payan and Cruz 2017). The border is therefore both sharp – visible on satellite imagery – and very 'fuzzy'. It also represents a hugely contradictory pattern of activities. On the one hand, as is clear to anyone with a passing interest in US politics or TV shows like *Breaking Bad*, the border is significantly militarized and, for much of its length, situated in harsh desert terrain (Coleman 2012; Vulliamy 2011). The borderland is not easy to cross. And yet there are hundreds of millions of legal crossings of the border every year, as there are deep connections of work, family and trade across the line. It is a line which also crosses straight through several indigenous territories, like many colonial boundaries, and which at the same time has become integral, through the production facilities located on the Mexican side of the border for US industries, to the economies of both countries. All of these border-crossings have, of course, produced a hugely hybridised cultural mix in terms of music, food, and language (Alvarez 2012; Heyman 2012). These may be mediated by very modern forms of communication which, like other specific details of this boundary, are not directly comparable to the Roman world – but the combination of contradictory practices of border-making and border-crossing nonetheless provides much food for thought.

The same can be said when we look at the deeper history of this border region, and the process of its development, indeed its inversion from a north-facing imperial frontier to the south-facing one just described. The northern frontier of the Spanish empire in Central and South America was a rather more fluid and expansive space than the later border, but there are elements of its creation, its administration, and its transformation over time that bear comparison to Roman examples. Spanish interests north of Mexico progressed gradually from the mid-16th century and spread from the two early foci of New Mexico and Florida to the intervening territories of Texas and Louisiana, and the far western frontier in California, both of the latter provinces being enormous and extending well into the modern US (Ganster and Collins 2021: 21-39; Weber 2009). One aspect of the later history of these regions which complicates comparisons is of course the competition Spain was engaged in with other European empires – Britain, France and Russia – and then the new settler nation-state of the US. It is also true that the difference between all these European colonial powers and the indigenous peoples of central and north America was likely greater in various dimensions than anything in the Roman world – though the scale of ethnographic encounter may still have been comparable (cf. e.g. Ferris 2003; Herda 1997). The religious difference, in particular, and the significance of this aspect of Spanish colonial ideology, meant that as well as forts (*presidios*) in the frontier zone, which we might expect, there were also the religious institutions of the missions. However, the forts assumed more importance over time, and the way that these acted as hubs of military involvement in many aspects of frontier life, while also providing contexts for the mixing of different people and cultures, is striking. Even though the *presidios* were spread thinly over significant distances, indeed perhaps because of this, the imposition of Spanish rule was not just a one-way process of change, but opened up the process of hybridisation that continued to

develop once the borderland was reconfigured as that between Mexico and the US (Faulk 1979 [1969]; Ganster and Collins 2021: 5-12, 166-78; Weber 2009: 221-42). Indeed, the distinctive border regional identity was an important player in the political landscape of Mexico through the period of that country's revolution in the early 20th century (Ganster and Collins 2021: 30-8, 61-73). The influence of frontier regions on the empires and states on both sides of this region is itself another key point of comparison with the long-term trajectory of Roman frontiers.

## Conclusion: frontiers, borderlands and the future

Comparisons between the Roman Empire and later imperial societies are, of course, nothing new – they are embedded in the study of the Roman world from even before that study even remotely resembled modern academic enquiry. Simon James himself has thoroughly documented and analysed this for the Roman military, for example, and shown how efforts to emulate Rome in early modern military organisation eventually led to early modern structures being used as models for the interpretation of Rome (2002: 9). This widespread phenomenon, which more broadly underpins the whole of the 'Romanization' paradigm and traditional archaeology of the Roman Empire (cf. e.g. Hingley 2000), understandably brought the seeking of parallels with modern empires into some disrepute, acting as part of the stimulus of the shift towards globalisation theory referred to in the Introduction (Hingley 2005), and prompting more detailed comparisons with selected ancient empires (e.g. Scheidel (ed.) 2015). However, provided we are careful to define the aims of comparative approaches – seeking inspiration from differences as well as similarities – and mindful of the causal connections between some early modern practices and contemporary (mis-)understandings of Roman models, then there is much to be gained from taking a broad approach to the role of frontiers in imperial societies. Moreover, while it is perhaps over-ambitious to presume that Roman archaeologists can prevent the world sliding into a new era of ignorance and conflict on their own, they can at least engage with misconceptions of the Roman frontiers used in both populist and specialist discourse, and particularly with those areas of the latter which are closer to policy-making than we might hope to be (cf. Hanscan and Buchanan 2023).

In the diverse frontiers and borderlands of southern North America, therefore, we see many differences from Rome – climate and landscape, technology, ecological and epidemiological factors, and hugely distinctive indigenous cultures all create particular dynamics across the centuries from first European contact to the present. At the same time, these make the similarities even more striking, particularly the overarching interplay of boundary-crossing and boundary-making, which should make us attend ever more closely to the precise ways in which this worked across the range of Roman frontiers, guiding new research. Equally, the profound interactions between frontier communities and social, economic and political development of both the imperial state and its neighbours is something that Roman archaeology needs to seriously engage with. New, comparative perspectives on the Roman frontiers can therefore have an impact in both directions – just like the frontiers themselves, in fact – benefitting Roman studies and the many audiences to whom it speaks.

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# From French Conquest to Algerian Independence: French Foreign Legion and the Roman Legionary Base at Lambaesis

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## Introduction

In 1958, *Le Monde* presented its first yearly round-up of the excavations abroad carried out by the French Archaeological Mission. The feature showcased international influence and the scientific vitality of French archaeology abroad. This first issue (Parrot 1958) commented that unlike other European countries, France is the only one to have its missions directly affiliated with, and sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The excavation commission (*commission des fouilles*) responsible for managing archaeological activity oversaw the works reported on in the feature, which aimed to 'honour the French science and its high traditions'. The texts were prepared by then chief conservator of oriental antiquities, and later the director of the Louvre, André Parrot. With time, the articles (Parrot 1965) became accompanied by a map, illustrating the worldwide distribution of the fieldwork, including several projects in North Africa. The international influence of the French missions captured through the newspaper articles was scientific, but also political; a form of soft power reflected in the wide geographical spread of the ancient sites subject to excavation. Yet, reporting on the activity in 1962, Parrot (1963) acknowledged that due to international situations research needs to 'naturally take into account the political conditions of the moment, and our expeditions can only go to the countries that welcome them or request them.' At that time, France had recently lost its hold over Algeria, following a difficult War of Independence (1954-1962). Some of the archaeological work in the country had stopped with the onset of the war, while the future of work on some key sites, such as the Roman military base at Lambaesis were uncertain (Lassus 1956: 57). With its excavation history dating back to the period of the French conquest of Algeria (1830-1848) more than a century earlier, the site tells a poignant story of colonial archaeology, and particularly the Foreign Legion's role within it. The War of Independence entailed a new influx of the Foreign Legion's troops, with military activity taking place once more in the region of the site. This second episode of the story of Lambaesis and the Foreign Legion has so far not been told. By examining the case study of Lambaesis, this study opens up the topic of reception of Roman frontiers during the decolonisation period in North Africa, asking at times uncomfortable questions about the status of Rome's frontiers as both Roman heritage and as modern conflict heritage. This paper asks what both episodes of the Foreign Legion's involvement with the site tell us about the difference a century apart made to the Foreign Legion's approach to the use of Roman past, and what these episodes mean for how we tell the story of Lambaesis as Roman frontier heritage in 21st century.

## Roman frontiers in Africa and colonial production of knowledge

During Europe's expansion and consolidation in North Africa, military presence and recording of archaeology often went hand in hand. The French invasion of Algeria led to early large-scale excavation and documentation of several Roman military sites. Prior to the invasion, the earliest European mentions of Lambaesis date to 1720s, when a French naturalist Jean-André Peyssonnel travelled in the area with an escort of horsemen provided by the bey of Constantine (Dureau de la Malle 1838: 346-51). The ruins of Lambaesis remained inaccessible for much of the first decade of the French invasion of Algeria. Only after the French conquest of the Ottoman Beylik of Constantine, new accounts of visits to Lambaesis started surfacing (Effros 2018: 129-133). During the conquest of Algeria (1830-1848), daily private travel logs kept by soldiers frequently noted the presence of Roman ruins (Dondin-Payre 1991b). Individual interest was echoed by the military command. Created in 1840, the Commission for the scientific exploration of Algeria (*Commission d'exploration scientifique de l'Algérie*) was supported by the Ministry of War (*le Ministre de la Guerre*) and aimed to understand the geography and the 'Roman strategy' for colonisation of Algeria (Dondin-Payre 1991c: 239-242). We have a good understanding of the involvement of French personnel in the discovery of Roman military sites and of the archaeological work of colonial officers operating in Algeria, such Jean Baradez (1895-1965) who excavated Ad Maiores and Gemellae and Jean-Luc Carbuccia (1808-1854) who worked at Lambaesis. What is less developed is a longer-term perspective on the intertwining of individual sites within longer histories of European military action and colonisation, extending into contemporary past. These stories are important as they pertain directly to how we go about narrating Roman frontiers as universal, transnational

heritage today. What I would like to suggest is that Europe's 'what divides us, connects us' (Jones 2021) approach to Roman frontiers in 21st century requires some refining as it does not immediately work in all contexts. The story arc of Roman frontiers research in Britian and Europe in the aftermath of World War II and the Cold War period as one of overcoming armed conflict in the name of international scientific unity (Breeze *et al.* 2022) differs from the realities of the histories of uses and exploration of sites in territories previously colonised by European powers. The wars in Europe were not colonial in nature. Colonial wars have absolute goals, such as gaining total control over a territory and its people, while regular wars tend to be more limited in scope. Colonial wars are also charactersied by excessive violence, guerilla warfare and widespread weaponisation of cultural knowledge - It is this colonial epistemology that we should be particularly keen to disentangle. It is also the physical, and epistemic violence implicit in colonial context that means that it might be appropriate to conceptualise the 19th and 20th century reception, and physical and ideological use of Roman military sites in colonial context as a form of conflict heritage.

As it has been well exemplified, the production of scientific and historical knowledge is part of the same dialectics of empire as are politics, economics and hegemionising cultural tendencies (Said 1979, 1994). In colonial circumstances Rome became a cultural idiom for domination centred around the themes of justification, admiration and emulation (Lorcin 2002: 295-296). Identification of European colonial powers with the Roman past permeated ideas about *romanization* and resistance to Roman culture (Leveau 2016). The association of European colonial armies with Roman armies, perceived as their predecessors, was a well-established blueprint among officers of the British Empire (Hingley 2000) and in the French context (Benseddik 1998; Dondin-Payre 1991b). Even though it was not until 1911 that Libya became an Italian colony, Italians quickly learnt to incorporate an interpretation of the Roman past into their colonial ideology too (Munzi 2004: 71-73). The dominant 19th and 20th century European paradigm presented the Romans (the colonisers) as opposed to the Barbarians (the colonised). It is no wonder then that in North Africa remnants of Roman past with time became viewed as representing an earlier episode of European occupation (Mattingly 2023: 51-57).

In the context of the French Foreign Legion and Lambaesis, cultural memories evoking the themes of justification, admiration and emulation could be created, conjured up and invented with the use of references to Roman frontier heritage and Roman military history. Cultural memory is defined as the ways in which groups, nations and communities store, transmit and receive the ideas about their shared past. Unlike individual personal memory, which is tied to direct, lived experience, cultural memory is anchored in externalised, institutionalised and public forms such as texts, rituals, monuments, images and commemorations (Assmann 2011: 13-70). These memories were then incorporated into the Legion's foundational myth.

The first phase of the Foreign Legion's interest in Lambaesis during the conquest of Algeria falls within the formative period of the Legion's identity. While not repeating much of what has already been written elsewhere, this paper signposts the key aspects of the 19th century utilisation of the Roman past by the French Foreign Legion as the prelude to the second pivotal period of change in face of the demise of the French colonial power. This paper owes much to Professor Simon James and our trips to the Marquiz pub in Leicester. Our conversations about colonial relativisations of past, objectivity in interpretation of past conflict, activities of European troops in the Euphrates and parallels between North Africa and European military involvement with the site of Dura-Europos inspired this work.

## Lambaesis and the Foreign Legion during the French conquest of Algeria

The use of Roman heritage at the base of Legion III Augusta at Lambaesis is an outstanding example of the scope of colonial absolutist approach to the past, denying the relativity of its own system of knowledge.

The site consists of first a smaller cavalry base set up in 81 A.D., and a later Trajanic legionary fortress and a parade ground. The base grew a substantial town which became the capital of the province of Numidia under Septimius Severus, with the Legion finally departing in 392 A.D. (Mattingly 2023: 303-306). The story of European discovery and exploration of the site provides an example of the impact of colonial efforts on Roman archaeology and the nearby local communities, whilst also illustrating the transition from conquest to integration into metropolitan France (Effros 2018: 128). The 19th century encounters of the French Foreign Legion with Lambaesis also reveal something about the psychology of colonial conflict and the Foreign Legion's circumstances at the time.

In 1840s, the site was explored by Carbuccia, then commander of the 2nd Regiment of the Foreign Legion. Carbuccia carried out pioneering excavations in the Aesculapius' sanctuary as well as a survey of the Roman remains in the region of Batna, producing a detailed map and a report of considerable scope.

This work provides in many cases the only record of archaeology which has since disappeared. Carbuccia went out of his way to record the remains, even if at time the initiatives did not gain the full support of his superiors (Dondin-Payre 1996). His excavation notes indicate that he considered the site to have a great potential for informing the French objectives in Algeria by providing insights into the actions of Romans perceived as France's predecessors (Effros 2018: 141). The ruins quickly became an instrument of colonial ideology as the site bore witness to violent episodes as the French military engaged in campaigns against local populations.

Carbuccia's excavations at Lambaesis are an example of the blind spots inherent in working with information produced by European colonial servicemen. Having denounced the destruction of a Christian inscription on the site by local children as a 'political crime', he inflicted severe punishment on the local people of Chemorra for the damage. His personal journal, kept during these campaigns records progress made in surveying the historical landscape, but it also scarcely mentions the skirmishes, deaths, and hardships faced by local communities, contrasting the scholarly interest in the ruins with the reality of colonial violence (Effros 2018: 161-162). As Effros (2018: 162) points out, this illustrates the lacunae in colonial accounts and the necessity to read similar material against its grain. Early in the history of the invasion and under the command of Governor-General Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, relations with local communities deteriorated, whilst the size of the occupying army increased to 90,000. From 1840 onward, military patrols and punitive actions against civilians, villages and crops became routine, normalising violence against the indigenous people, increasing troop mobility in response to guerrilla warfare and resulting in increasing civilian casualties (Gallois 2013: 100-121).

The strategic location of Lambaesis meant that French infantry columns frequently passed it enroute to campaigns in the Aurès Mountains and the Sahara (Effros 2018: 148-149). In 1849, Colonel François-Certain de Canrobert's column of four thousand men witnessed the ruins, known by this time from Carbuccia's excavations, as they headed to suppress a rebellion in Narah (Bocher 1857: 861). In 1850, General Armand Jacques Leroy de Saint-Arnaud arrived at Lambaesis with a column of soldiers of the Foreign Legion to demonstrate French dominance in the Aurès and Nementchas Mountains. In correspondence with his wife and brother, Saint-Arnaud (1855b: 181-183) described the eight hours he spent wandering around the ruins at Lambaesis (Saint-Arnaud 1855b: 181, letter dated to 1 May 1850). Although he took time to have lunch with other officers near the newly discovered temple of Aesculapius to the tune of the Foreign Legion's band, Saint-Arnaud spent a lot of time in the ruins in solitude. Earlier letters to his brother convey constant anxiety, fear for his comrades dying, and the tough conditions in the field (Saint-Arnaud 1855b: 100-145). During his first visit to Lambaesis he took refuge in the ruins and contemplated the 'mortality' the Roman remnants conveyed to him. Such behaviour could indicate what modern scholars would refer to as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The letter reveals existential thoughts, including questioning what is the point of creation, here understood as the mission of conquest, if the ruination of Lambaesis is an example of what the end of 'most beautiful things' is. Before his troops moved southward, Saint-Arnaud visited the site once more and devoted over an hour to meditating in the temple of Asclepius, all while the Foreign Legion troops played him Strauss waltzes (Saint-Arnaud 1855b: 183, letter dated to 2 May 1850). A sense of identification with the Roman past is palpable in his letters. While stress, death, cold and misery were already a constant in his letters from his early years in Algeria, comparisons with the Roman past in the early years revealed an enthusiasm for the war, instead of the angst of the later years. In December 1839 he wrote: 'We are going to march like the Romans, tracing the path in front of us' (...) 'We will cross the Iron Gates, which Romans never saluted with their eagle' (Saint-Arnaud 1855a: 181, 7 December 1838, own translation). The Iron Gates are a mountain pass and by crossing it, the expedition Saint-Arnaud was part of disregarded the clause of the Treaty of Tafna, reigniting the war and moving France into another phase of the conquest (McDougall 2017: 61-67). There was, however, more to the use of Roman past than just casual interest of the officer class.

Military practices and ceremonies, endorsed by the military command, bridged a formal connection between the French troops and the Roman past. One event, which was also remarked on by Saint-Arnaud's letters, illustrates this well. In 1849, Carbuccia's Batna garrison assembled in front of the tomb of Titus Flavius Maximus, a Roman officer buried near Lambaesis. Carbuccia had ordered the 11th Artillery Regiment to restore the monument, which had been partially damaged by a recent earthquake and likely to collapse. The regiment dismantled and reassembled the stones replacing broken masonry, but in the process damaged the lead urn inside the monument. The colonel ordered to replace it with a new container and reinter the Roman cremation. The occasion of placing of the last stone was marked with a 'touching' ceremony to pay the Roman officers military honours accompanied by a battalion salute (Lenormant and de Witte 1849: 797). A legacy of this event was an addition of a new Latin inscription, with a drawing of the reconstructed

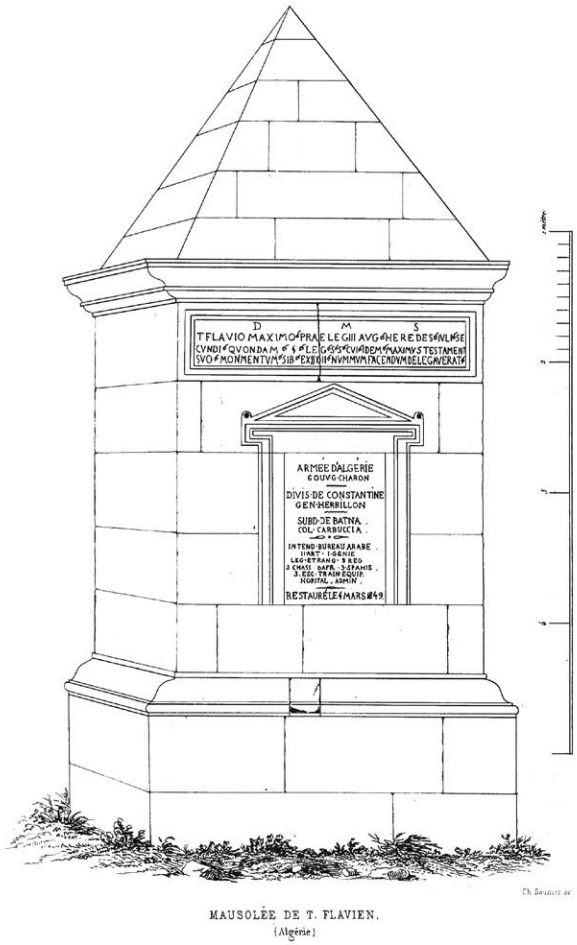


Figure 1. Tomb of Titus Flavius Maximus after restitution by the French Foreign Legion and addition of its own inscription. (Adapted from Renier 1850, Plate 1).

monument supplied to the Revue Archéologique (Renier 1850: Plate 140). The new inscription (Figure 1), located in the middle of the monument, recited the French military chain of command in Algeria, from the Governor General, the general in charge of the Department, Carbuccia as the head of the subdivision of Batna, down to listing the individual units inclusive of the engineers, hospital and the administrative staff. Remarking on this initiative, Carbuccia's contemporary general Du Barail wrote that the colonel dedicated the monument to his colleague of the Third Roman Legion (Dondin-Payre 1996: 170). The initiative is one of the more apparent examples of direct identification with the Roman past.

While the Foreign Legion's relationship with the Roman past might seem superficial, the rhetoric was both serious (Effros 2018: 144) and convenient as a common identity marker for troops consisting of various nationalities and fleeing their countries due to political and historical circumstances. What the soldiers did have in common is that at the time the recruits were mostly from regions of the former Roman Empire, and mostly its western, European parts. As French military command at the time commented, the corps was seen by some as 'an asylum for misfortune'; a safe destination for foreign deserters and refugees both from France and other countries, who if left in France could end up causing trouble (Porch 2010: 36; Azan 1936: 124). In the decade when the Foreign Legion's additional inscription on the tomb of Titus Flavius Maximus was set up, the Foreign Legion struggled with problems with desertion, dwindling *esprit de corps* and challenges to cohesion (Porch 2010: 61-65, 131). Units included in Carbuccia's inscription consisted of a variety of types, diverse ethnic make-up and at the time, did not have particularly long traditions. Among the units listed in the inscription one finds the 3rd regiment of Chasseurs d'Afrique. This consisted of Europeans, or Algerians of French origin and was a unit that established itself as the more prestigious 'European element' of the Legion's Mediterranean cavalry (Sicard and Vauvillier 2008: 8-9, 14-16). This unit was followed on the inscription by the 3rd Regiment of the Chasseurs Spahis, rank and file locally recruited irregular horsemen drawn from Arab and Berber volunteers, who were often Muslim and a less prestigious unit (Gandy 1987: 11-65). The principle of labour specialisation tied to the tradition of a particular unit's ethnic origin became one of the foundational traditions of the French Foreign Legion (Porch 2010: 762). A sense of purpose the Legion aimed to instill, combined with keeping men occupied through archaeological recording, inspired obedience, a better understanding of the soldier's moral duties in Africa and smoother execution of orders (Jomard 1855: 163). The story of the controversial monument to Titus Flavius Maximus reached its finale with its destruction in 1986. The local authorities were unable to identify and apprehend the perpetrators. As a prominent Algerian scholar observes (Benseddik 1998: 796), one should be surprised that this supposed symbol of continuity between the French and the Romans survived independence for that long.

Colonial troops were not consistent in their approach to protecting the Roman heritage. An agricultural colony at Lambaesis was set up in 1848 and settled by deportee convicts who were deemed too difficult to handle for them to remain in France. Their accommodation was built from stone reused from the Roman remains, including the Septizonium nymphaeum located some 7km away from the agricultural colony (Greenhalgh 2014: 281). Around the same time as the restoration of the mausoleum of Titus Flavius Maximus, the fortress was chosen to become the location of a political prison, selected largely as a convenient source of cut stone (Dondin-Payre 1991a: 44-45). Following Carbuccia's request, the Ministry of War authorised the construction of the prison in 1850, with the work

starting a year later and undertaken by the Foreign Legion, political detainees and Arab prisoners. The prison was built across the south-western quadrant of the fortress, in some places destroying the Roman barracks down to the level of foundations to extract the stone (Greenhalgh 2014: 282). The initial decision to set up a formal prison was spurred by an insurrection in Paris of 1848 (Morell 1854: 370) with the prison quickly becoming a busy facility, especially given the increasing numbers of political prisoners following the December 1851 coup d'état led by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, marking the beginning of France's transformation into the Second French Empire, with Louis as Napoleon III. At the point of his departure from Lambaesis, Saint-Arnauld (1855b: 183) tried to move the planned prison further away from the site, lamenting that he 'fears for his ruins'. Some 18 months after having left Lambaesis, Saint-Arnauld played a decisive part in the coup. It's unintended second order consequence was an influx of new prisoners to the facility set up in in his beloved ruins, and continuation of its destruction.

Following the erection of the political prison, large scale volunteer excavations were carried out by political deportees (Dondin-Payre 1996). French authorities believed that contact with the ruins would cultivate greater loyalty to France among the prisoners, seeing the Roman military remnants as symbolic forebears (Effros 2018: 157). Carbuccia also requested the creation of a colonial village, which took another decade to be constructed (Effros 2018: 149). Settler villages like the one at Lambaesis were being created across Algeria. These were seen as following the footsteps of the Romans by establishing dominion through colonial settlements in the area earlier occupied by Rome, with Revue Archéologique expressing a hope that the new settlements and the rail network built to service them would spare the Roman archaeology in their way (Lenormant and de Witte 1849: 501). To modern eyes, it may seem absurd that the prisoners detained in the facility whose construction destroyed so much of the site would then be turning to excavation to uncover fewer remains and inscriptions than would have been the case if the prison was not erected in the first place (Greenhalgh 2014:281). The army destroyed Roman monuments that had been spared for centuries by the local population, who had curated local knowledge about the ruins (Benseddik 1998: 796). By 1865, some of the inscriptions and statues were placed into a temporary museum in the *praetorium*, although the exact provenance of much of the material at that point was already unclear. Ironically, the director of the prison was tasked to oversee the conservation of finds from the site. Ad hoc excavations continued in subsequent years. In parallel, some of the key structures from the site were also disappearing, including the amphitheatre, temples, the nymphaeum and domestic structures (Greenhalgh 2014: 282). Setting aside from questions whether the Foreign Legion's early engagement with Lambaesis did more good than harm to archaeology, what is perhaps more important is the context these initiatives provide to this post-Roman use of the site. Through Foreign Legion's engagement with the site to meet its ideological and practical needs, Lambaesis became not only a marker of Roman heritage, but also that of the French colonial period – the military prison cutting into the playing card outline of the fortress being a stark reminder of this.

**Foreign Legion and the use of Roman past during the Algerian War of Independence**

The story of Lambaesis and the French Foreign Legion finds its epilogue over 100 years after Carbuccia's and Saint-Arnauld's time on site. On 29th of May 1945, in the aftermath of the German surrender on 7-8th May, a major celebratory event bringing together both the French military and the representatives of civilian authorities gathered in the large open areas of the archaeological site of Lambaesis (Figures 2-4). Germany surrendered only three weeks earlier, and now was an opportunity to celebrate the contribution of France's North African forces in the war effort. French government had moved to Algiers in 1943 and remained there until liberation of France, with the region serving a springboard for operations in France and Italy (Sawyer 1947: 355). The parade celebrated the units of the Territorial Division of Constantine region, including artillery, marines, legionaries, Moroccan Goumiers, Spahis and Algerian Tirailleurs. Among the decorated units were regiments of the 3rd Alpine Infantry Division (3e DIA), which distinguished itself in combat, becoming the most decorated French unit of World War II (Le Goyet and Michalon 1970: 741). The contribution of the unit was so significant that Marshal Alphonse Juin, and the unit's wartime commander General Goislard de Monsabert proclaimed the 3e DIA as a 'worthy heir of the Roman North African legion, Legio III Augusta' (Juin 1959: 264). The III Augusta was the legion which both built and occupied Lambaesis. The distinguished unit consisted of Algerian and Tunisian troops (Le Goyet and Michalon 1970: 741). General Raymond Duval, commander of the Territorial Division of Constantine, presented the 3rd Algerian Infantry Division to the civil and military authorities. A delegation of the unit in full uniform carried its flag through the ruins of the Roman monumental arch, commonly and mistakenly called the *praetorium* (Wilson 2012). Lieutenant General Henry Martin, commander of the 19th Corps Army, Colonel Lardin from the US Army and various other military figures saluted during the performance of military bands. Other officials included the prefect of the Constantine region, M. Lestrade-Carbonnel and General Bergeron, the Senior Commander of Tunisian


Figure 2. View of the ruins of Lambese during the preparations for the ceremony in honour of the 3rd DIA, 29th May 1945. SCA/Algérie (service cinématographique des armées en Algérie). © Author unknown/ECPAD/Défense, Image Reference: ALG 45-24-6772.

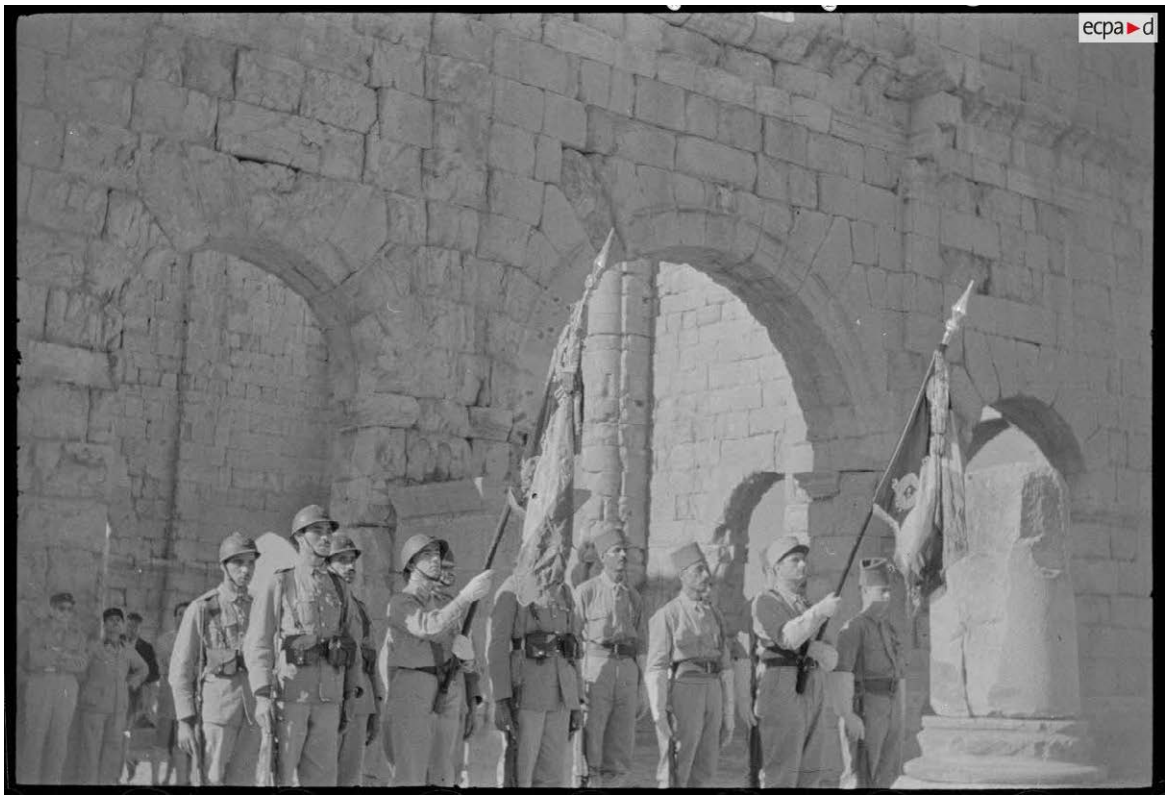


Figure 3. Unit standards of 3e DIA in front of the Lambaesis 'pratorium'. 29th May 1945. SCA/Algérie (service cinématographique des armées en Algérie). © Author unknown/ECPAD/Défense, Image Reference: ALG 45-24-6778>.


Figure 4. Presentation of military music. The tabors parade under the 'praetorium, 29th May 1945. SCA/Algérie (service cinématographique des armées en Algérie). © Author unknown/ECPAD/Défense, Image Reference: ALG 45-24-6769.


Figure 5. A reception meal with civil and military personalities. 29th May 1945. SCA/Algérie (service cinématographique des armées en Algérie). © Author unknown/ECPAD/Défense, Image Reference: ALG 45-24-6780.

SUR LES TRACES DE LA IIIème AUGUSTA

*An 200* *7 novembre 1955.*

DANS la Cour d'Honneur de la "3ème Légion Augusta", adossé à l'antique monument de LAMBÈSE où les aigles romains étaient religieusement gardés, le IIIème Bataillon du 3ème Etranger est impeccablement aligné pour la parade.

Venant de TABERDGA, dans les Nementchas, il rejoint dans le secteur d'Arris ses deux Bataillons frères.

Groupé depuis 48 heures dans la cité antique qui fut la "BEL-ABBÈS romaine" il s'est rassemblé, sous les ordres du Commandant LANGLOIS, avec la 4ème Portée commandée par le Lieutenant JALUZOT.

A 9 heures, la musique du régiment fait retentir un anachronique Boudin sous la voûte imposante et c'est la présentation au drapeau suivie de la remise d'une palme au fanion du IIIème Bataillon qui s'illustra à DIEN BIEN PHU.

Le Colonel THOMAS remet ensuite la Croix de Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur au Lieutenant JALUZOT et la Médaille Militaire aux Sergents-Chefs SZABO et LUDER, aux Sergents STUNDZIG et MARGOT et au Caporal WOLF.

A son tour le Commandant LANGLOIS remet au Lieutenant BERTRAND et au Capitaine POISSON les fanions de la C. B. et de la 11ème Cie.

Le Bataillon défile ensuite sous le prétorium, martelant, au rythme des cuivres, les dalles séculaires.

Et si ces pierres ont une âme elle a dû s'émouvoir, après 17 siècles de léthargie, de ce réveil inattendu, en ce matin d'automne du 7 novembre 1955.

Certes, les casques au cimier d'airain ont fait place aux képis blancs mais les valeurs et la mission demeurent.

Figure 6. 'In the footsteps of the IIIrd Augusta' Coverage of the 7th November 1955 Foreign Legion military parade in Képi Blanc Magazine (February 1956, Issue 142) © Author unknown/ Képi blanc magazine/ Légion étrangère.

troops. At the end of the ceremony a reception took place (Figure 5). Military and local personalities were seated cross-legged in front of a staged Bedouin tent, with rugs in front of them and wine bottles. The event finished with a traditional méchoui roast (Établissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense Image Collection, Image Reference ALG 45-24).

Yet, this celebratory tone is at odds with events which took place in the region only a few weeks earlier. On the 8th of May, a demonstration was planned in the nearby city of Setif to celebrate the end of the War World II. Aside from the official march, a second one was organised by Algerian groups to mark their numbers alongside the Allied powers, to show flags and slogans advocating for independent Algeria and to lay a wreath at the local war memorial to commemorate the tens of thousands of North Africans killed serving in French units. Police were instructed to seize the banners. Shots were fired (McDougall 2017: 179). Panic spilled over the streets. Random killing followed with 20 Europeans dead and the gendarmerie shooting at Algerian crowds. The following days were marked by attacks on colonial villages in the countryside, leading to the death of over 100 Europeans. Repressions followed, including artillery, aerial and naval bombardment. They lasted until 26 May and were both ferocious and indiscriminate. It is thought that between 6,000-8,000 Algerians were killed. Many people were imprisoned (McDougall 2017: 180). Many of those arrested were imprisoned in Le Bagne de Lambèse, the old penal colony originally built by the Foreign Legion. During the next two decades many Algerians with an anticolonial stance were imprisoned in the Lambèse facility (Garratón Mateu 2022: 34). General Reymond Duval, who led the parade at Lambaesis, coordinated the French authorities' response to the unrest, which became known as the Sétif massacre. In his reports, he wrote that he secured peace, but only temporarily and that further strive for Algerian independence is inevitable (Rey-Goldzeiguer

2022: 330-334). While the celebration held at Lambaesis on 29th May 1945 might seem like a show of unity under the umbrella of common Roman past, it really signalled that peace was possible only on French terms, ad this meant within a relationship of the imperial metropole and its colony.

It was this next, inevitable episode of conflict that brought a new wave of the Foreign Legion's interest in the site as backdrop to its ceremonies, used in support to how it narrated its history and its mission in Algeria. The region of Batna played a pivotal role during the Algerian War of Independence. For France, the war began on 1st November 1954 in Batna, when mujahedeen attacked the city's barracks. The city became the command headquarters for the revolution until Algeria gained independence (Sutton *et al.* 2024). The conflict caught the Legion by surprise as in 1954 the only units in Algeria were the 1st Infantry Regiment (1er REI) and the depôt commun de la Légion Étrangère, both training and administrative units stationed in the Legion's main base at Sidi-bel-Abbès. Most of the other units were still engaged in Asia (Porch 2010: 773). As the revolution began, units were pulled from Morocco, and from the recently finished First Indochina War. The Third Foreign Infantry Regiment (3e REI) was the first one to return from Indochina, and sent into the Aurès mountains in December 1954 to relieve the 1er REI (Windrow 1997: 24; Porch 2010: 773). The first phase of transfers to Algeria continued throughout Spring and Summer of 1955 (Comor 2010: 82). At first, French military operations were concentrated in the Aurès, and the response was an improvised one. Progressively increased fighting took place, with skirmishes and clashes against guerilla groups. The numbers of casualties were also increasing, including among civilians (McDougall 2017: 198-201; Porch 2010: 773).

Soon after the completion of the first phase of regrouping of units, a major parade took place in the ruins of Lambaesis on the 7th November 1955 (Figure 6). This drew together units that were already in Algeria prior to the war, those transferred right at the beginning of the conflict and those that had only recently touched the ground on the continent. The units included the First, Second and the Third Foreign Infantry Regiments (Képi Blanc 1956: 15-16). The Second Regiment (2e REI) is the same unit that was once commanded by Carbuccia. Other units included the 4th Motorised Company (4e Portée) and the First Foreign Parachute Regiment (1er BEP). The parade drew troops that ordinarily were scattered across a large area of northeastern Algeria. The HQ of 1er REI was located 700km west of Lambaesis, but some of the troops were only recently deployed in the Aurès area in the autumn that year (Windrow 1997: 31). 2e REI's HQ was 200km to the north of Lambaesis in Ziama Mansouria, the 4th Motorised Company was also scattered, with its HQ in Tebessa near the Tunisian border, at 200km distance from Lambaesis. The paratrooper unit (1er BEP) was formally stationed in Zeralda some 400km away (Windrow 1997: 30-31). Aside from large distances, the units were also divided by their diverse traditions, with some like the Second Infantry Regiment being among the oldest units in the Legion, whilst others having been established much more recently and undergoing changes to their organisation following the retreat from Indochina. At the time, the 1er BEP was the newest regiment of the Foreign Legion. The contingents grouped for 48 hours in the vicinity of the Roman ruins in advance of the parade (Képi Blanc 1956).

Lambaesis was a convenient location not only since it was close to Batna, a critical area for the Foreign Legion's operations in the early stages of the war, but also because the conditions in the base camps at Batna and Biskra were both primitive and increasingly cramped, given the swift decision to move units into Algeria (Porch 2010: 774). Biskra, for example, was only a Transit Camp, effectively a field camp of the French Army (Windrow 1997: 24). As a memoir of a Legion's NCO reveals, these installations were hardly fit to improve the morale of the newly arrived units (Kemencei 1985: 297-8). Lambaesis, due to its connection to the imagined past of the Foreign Legion offered a grander location. At 9am the regimental band played the Boudin, the Legion's march, under the vault of the *praetorium*. This was followed by the presentation of the troops to the flags, awarding military decorations to companies, and finally awarding personal medals to those who distinguished themselves individually, all taking place in the presence of senior officers, including Colonel Thomas. Finally, the troops paraded through the *praetorium* to the sound of the Legion's band. Troops pictured parading through the arches of the *praetorium* included the 2e REI's Combat Support Company (CA), and the 1er BEP, with the Foreign Legion described as 'now taking over from the Romans who guarded the gate twenty centuries ago' (Camerone 1956: 156, own translation from French). Pictured was also the soldiers of 3e REI who were due to move to Taberdga to support its two sister regiments (Képi Blanc 1956: 15-16).

An important element of the celebration was the military honours ceremony, including decoration of a palm to the pennant of the 11th Combat Company of the 3e REI for its service in the siege of Dien Bien Phu (Képi Blanc 1956). While the parade might make it seem that the Legion was celebrating its victories, the reality was that The Indochina War was a huge loss for France. The causalities in the Foreign Legion reached over 10,000 men (Brunon 1981: 389; Porch 2010: 760). The battle at Dien Bien Phu was the last major loss, and the failure that ultimately led to France's withdrawal from

its former colony. The French imperial military system was eroding, and its old principle of heterogenous units with specialisms according to ethnic characteristics and combat qualities ascribed to them. In tandem, the discipline began to weaken as during the Indochina conflict the detachments were scattered in isolated posts, often under the command of inexperienced and young NCOs. The situation was bad enough for large numbers of desertions to occur during the units' transfer through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea (Comor 2010: 82). In the face of these challenges, the command focused on a message that the Legion was special, as evidenced by its traditions. Turning a page on the humiliation of the Indochina War, Algeria was seen as the place where the Legion could return to its traditions (Porch 2010: 762-4). It is in that push for reconnecting with traditions that we can find the reason why Lambaesis was attractive to the military command as a location for the ceremony.

The Foreign Legion's press coverage of the 7th November 1955 parade was soaked up in identification with the Roman past. To provide context for Lambaesis, Képi Blanc (1956: 15-16), the Legion's monthly newsletter (Figure 6), compared it to the Roman equivalent of Sidi Bel Abbès, the Foreign Legion's main HQ in Algeria. Since the 1830s, Sidi Bel Abbès was the Legion's basic training camp, and the headquarters of its 1st Foreign Regiment (1er REI). In 1849 a colonial settlement town was established around the military base (Windrow 2010: 138), and with progressive redevelopment and clearance initiatives the town also lost much of its original character. The base was the geographic and spiritual epicentre of the Legion. This was the anchor for its traditions, with a dedicated museum containing the Legion's most sacred relics, and a legionary cemetery. Elements of that tradition, particularly its visual language drew on the vocabulary of Roman art. For example, a 1928 personification of Sidi Bel Abbès was presented as a woman wearing Roman-style robes and a Phrygian liberty cap (Slyomovics 2020: 784), an inspiration likely derived from Roman representation of provinces as indigenous women. The Legion's myths and its history coined Algeria and Bel Abbès into components of the Legion's personality (Porch 2010: 766-767). Yet, at the time of the Legion's return to Algeria the number of officers with experience in North Africa, had largely diminished, except for a few officers

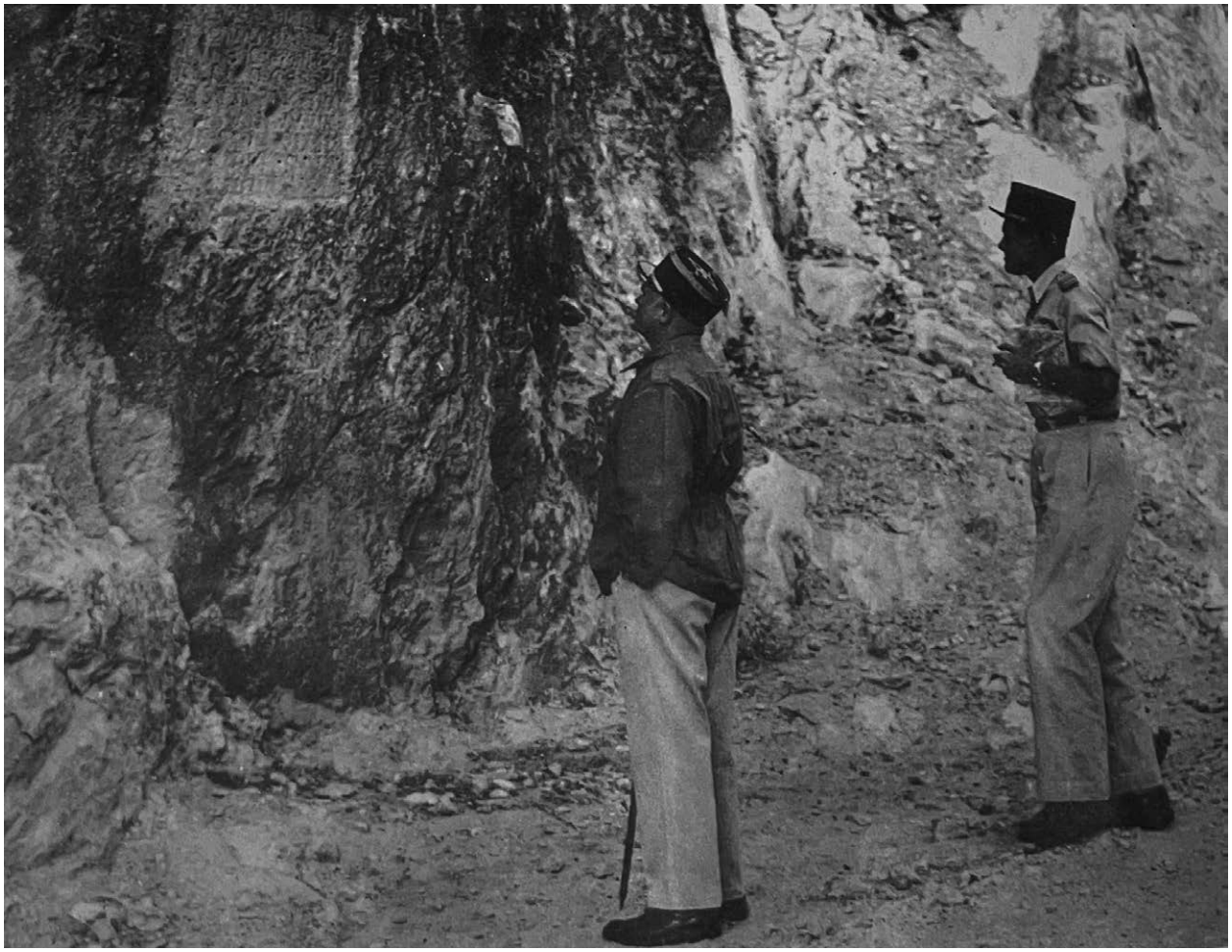

Figure 7. Colonel Thomas in front of the Roman inscriptions of the Tirhanimine gorges, Képi Blanc Magazine (October 1955, Issue 102) © H. Uitz/Képi blanc magazine / Légion étrangère.

in the upper ranks. An entire generation of younger officers lacked personal attachment to North Africa (Porch 2010: 772). Comparison between Lambaesis and Sidi Bel Abbès offered an anchor point, an explanation of the significance of the ruins, but also an affirmation of the *raison d'être* of the Legion's presence in Algeria, harking back to an ancient and glorious past and a sense of purpose. Képi Blanc (1956: 16, own translation from French) concluded that:

> '(...) if these stones have a soul, it must have been moved, after 17 centuries of lethargy, by this unexpected awakening (...). Certainly, the helmets with bronze crests have given way to white caps, but the values and the mission remain.'

Identification with the Roman past and colonial overtones are apparent in this passage; the parade presented the troops with an opportunity to view their historical impact in a positive light.

Throughout the next few years, Roman remains found in the areas where the units operated would become a frequent point of reference in the Foreign Legion's self-narrative. Military leadership was keen to highlight the apparent parallels when opportunities presented themselves. By November 1955, the Third Infantry Regiment (3e REI) had largely established itself in the Aurès mountains. At the time, Colonel Thomas was also pictured in the gorge of Tirhanimine next to an inscription on a Roman route from Lambaesis to Biskra (Figure 7). Képi Blanc (1955) dedicated an extended feature to cover the Third's recent activity, presenting a romanticised vision of service in the mountainous passages, diminishing the significance of clashes with the National Liberation Army (ANL) and narrating the Colonel's encounter with the Roman inscription:

> 'And taking the tunnel dug by the Romans, we find their mark in the rock which centuries of bad weather have not been able to destroy. "Flavius, it is written, Centurion of the 26th African Legion, dedicates this plaque to his Emperor Hadrian the Great, of powerful fame, in the year 321". In some two thousand years, others may read the signs that our Legion has also traced in stone and in a naive admiration will confuse them with those of our glorious predecessors' (Wassner 1955: 26, own translation from French).

The inscription in question is CIL VIII 10230 and dates to between 143-146 A.D. The text was set up by a vexillation of Legion VI Ferratae and is dedicated to Antonius Pius (Le Bohec 2009: 194; 1989: 378). The inscription is located at the exit of the Tighanimine and commemorates the vexillation's work on the development of the passage through the gorge. The Foreign Legion military reporter's reading is wrong in terms of the key facts, including the date of the inscription, the Roman Legion involved, and the name of the emperor. It is likely that Hadrian was conjured up as a familiar name for the Foreign Legion's staff as they would have encountered inscriptions bearing the name at Lambaesis. The Legion had unknowingly made a full circle on its imagined attachment to the Roman past. The same inscription was first recorded, and done so correctly, by Saint-Arnaud (1855b: 204, letter dated to 12th June 1850), and later published by Carbuccia (Faure 2004; Morizot 2008: 1614-15). Reflecting on the inscription, Saint-Arnaud commented that 'there is nothing new under the sun' as he realised that the Foreign Legion could not claim to be 'the first' to pass the gorge. First meaning the first for Europeans, as given the wartime context there is no mention of any local communities who might have had familiarity with the terrain for generations. Memory of Foreign Legion officers' interest in the Roman past was limited, as we find no mention of the 19th century encounters with this Roman inscription in the 20th century account of the Foreign Legion's (re)discovery of the text.

Association between the Roman armies and the Foreign Legion extended beyond chance encounters with epigraphy and choice of parade locations. References to the Roman army were woven into topics as varied as coverage of fencing training in Sidi Bel Abbès (Buchard 1955: 36), development of new barrack accommodation (Képi Blanc 1955: 15), and support for veterans. At times, references to Roman military equipment or names of Roman generals would also appear in the crossword section of the magazine. However, aside from evidence of general historical interest, one also finds echoes of what were at the time dominant theoretical standpoints in the study of Roman North Africa, for example regarding the benefits of Roman imperialisms for the provinces. We find such thought parallels in the context of the role of Roman military in urbanisation and the cultural role of veterans in the provinces. A feature dedicated to the First Infantry Regiment's (1er REI) work on wounded solders' welfare and their families' acclimatisation to life in Algeria presented a section on agricultural activity of legionaries, accompanied by a photograph of a French Foreign Legionary in uniform atop a tractor, with a remark from the commandant of the unit that 'this colonisation is worthy of the work of Roman legions' (Camerone 1958b: 37, own translation). Building work carried out by the troops, albeit relating to its own accommodation and infrastructure, would often be contrasted with acts of destruction at the hands of the 'rebels.' Camarone (1960) reported that the

soldiers of an armoured combat unit 1er REC 'became masons' as the unit fortified their new position 20km to the west of Lambaesis. The Foreign Legion drew on the trope of the Romans as builders to fashion its own self-image as agents of development. Accordingly, we hear that the unit 'settled in the Markouna farm, among the Roman remains of the Augusta legion' and that 'here too, taking up a thousand-year-old tradition, it has continued to build' (Camerone 1960: 113). The mention relates to the remains of a triumphal arch set up by Marcus Aurelius in Markouna (Vercunda), which was a *pagus* situated on the road between Lambaesis and Timgad (Fentress *et al.* 2023). The article was accompanied by a photograph of the ruins of Timgad, otherwise unrelated to the content of the report which was mainly concerned with territorial gains made.

References to Roman presence in Algeria were reinforced through initiatives to educate the troops about the 19th century history of the Foreign Legion and the role of Algeria in the Legion's origins. A six-article series in Képi Blanc (De Chaponniere 1955b) narrated the origin story of the Foreign Legion in Algeria, whilst also referencing the Roman past as the prologue to the Legion's foundational story. As a result, we here that: '(...) like the Roman soldiers, their predecessors on the land of Africa, the men of the Legion were in turn fighters, builders, pioneers, farmers' (De Chaponniere 1955a: 38, own translation from French). This vision drews on the legionnaire myth as a noble mercenary and an intermediary between France and its colonies in service of the national good, which by the 60s was already well established in popular culture (Cooper 2006: 272-278). Yet, as we saw, the vocabulary is also reminiscent of contemporary standpoints on *romanization*.

By 1956 the numbers of clashes between the French and the ANL increased with first defections from French Algerian units taking place, which drew suspicion to the rest of native Algerian troops. At the same time both guerilla groups and the French troops became more ruthless, with increased casualties among the civilians. It was at this time that France announced a significant increase in the size of the garrison, from around 200,000 to 500,000 (Windrow 1997: 24). The swollen-up contingent allowed increased out posting, patrols and other intelligence activities in the terrain. In 1956, the 2nd Infantry Regiment (2e REI) was operating 200km east of Lambaesis and tasked with opening and protecting train tracks across the region (Jacquot 1957: 56)

Camerone are published annually to mark the commemoration of the battle of Camerone and are part of the hagiography of the Foreign Legion. The volumes have small print runs, are aimed at the members of the Legion and weave in mythologized narratives of the Legion's past with yearly summaries of modern operations of the Legion's various units, contributing to creating a continuous cultural memory of the Legion. Camerone's report on the activity of the regiment provided a rose-tinted vision of the experiences offered by the Legion's intensified presence in remote posts, including activities one would not normally associate with wartime such as opportunities for tourism, recreation, benefits of outdoor living and mountaineering (Jacquot 1957: 54). Pursuit of interests in Roman archaeology became part of the presentation of some of the more attractive activities of troops outposted across the region. For example, 2e REI's mission was to thwart potential sabotage of train tracks, which entailed large scale landscape reconnaissance. During its work, the regiment recorded the presence of a Roman quarry and settlement at Bir-el-Ater, an achievement which was thought worthy of a mention in the unit's yearly summary of activity as a discovery, optimistically described as one that 'could revolutionize not only archaeology but also the history of Africa' (Jacquot 1957: 54).

In the same year, the First Battalion of the 3rd Infantry Regiment (3e REI) was engaged in guerilla warfare against the ANL in the Aurès region, across the Batna-Arris route. The clashes took place in difficult climate conditions, with the Foreign Legion prioritising making the area inhospitable to the Algerian resistance movement. Yet, in a bizarre throwback to a century old past, the command of the regiment's 1st Battalion led the yearly coverage of its activity with a statement that '(...) had it not been for the state of total insecurity in the territories covered at the beginning of the 1st Battalion, the postcards sent from Lambèse or Timgad could have been sent to their recipients that their correspondents, keen on archaeology, were meditating in front of the noble vestiges of left by their great ancients, the Legions of Rome' (Camerone 1957: 63, own translation from French). The 3e REI continued to take opportunities to draw on Roman past. In September 1957 the regiments' 13th Demi Brigade (13éme DBLE) operated in the Taberdga region as it engaged in clashes with the liberation movement. The village of Taberdga became the unit's local base. It is a visually striking place as it is nestled on the edge of a steep erosion cliff. Colonel Sengès, who replaced Colonel Thomas as the head of the unit the year before, carried out an official inspection of the troops on the edge of the cliff, accompanied by the sound of the regimental band. The event was attended by members of the local village community. Even though the village is of much later, Berber origin and has no direct Roman heritage, Camerone (1958a: 113, own translation below) led the report of the event with the a heading stating that '(...) Taberdga had no doubt never made such melodious

Figure 8. Parade of the 13th Demi Brigade (DBLE) through Lambaesis. 8th December 1958. Private collection of Lieutenant-colonel Paul Lucien Paschal © Richard Bareford, Wikicommons OA license.

sounds. Unless, perhaps seduced by this wild setting, the Roman cohorts have done it before and sounded their instruments.' Visible heritage was not always required to conjure up a connection between the Foreign Legion and the Roman armies, a striking natural scenery was enough.

The 13th Demi Brigade later returned to the vicinity of Lambaesis. On 8th December 1958 it held a parade in the ruins to mark the occasion of Colonel Sangès leaving the unit and to welcome his replacement Colonel Roux. The parade (Figure 8) was attended by General Gardy, the chief of the Foreign Legion at the time who formally passed the folded flag of the unit to its new commander (Képi Blanc 1959: 15). The ceremony took place on the cobbled courtyard in front of the *praetorium*, with the unit in parade uniform, assembled near the line of the courtyard's colonnade. The ceremony concluded with the 13th Demi Brigade marching through the *praetorium* archway, a moment which was captured by Camerone (1959: 111, own translation). The caption beneath the photographs harked back to the old trope of Rome as the civilising force in North Africa, and with the Roman army as its executive force:

> 'A gate of old age, that for thousands of years has seen only sand and wind... Rome had to think of immense things when lettings its Legions march. It set the foundations of a civilisation. Today, other legionaries, whom you command, my colonel, and to whom the best of them will give the last and magnificent example.'

The reportage presented a romanticised vision of the sand swept Roman ruins, brought back to life by the marching Foreign Legion. As the Tazoult-Lambèse prison is situated at a small distance behind the cobbled courtyard, the military photographers needed to take pictures from the south-western angle to portray the ruins as intact.

The penitentiary continued to operate and to expand onto the site of the Roman fortress. On May 28, 1953 the Governor General of Algeria informed the Prefect of Constantine that a 7ha plot was made available to the penitentiary for the needs of the Central House and that the Historic Monuments Service provided its permission. In 1960, 'light military constructions' were constructed to the southeast of the penitentiary with the agreement of the director of the Timgad-Lambèse excavations, the director of the Antiquities Department (Benseddik 1998: 791). Already in 1956 the museum and the ruins were under the guard of the French army (Lassus 1956: 56-57). The symbiosis between archaeological and military leadership was strengthened by the choice of the appointees. Lassus, who took over as the Director of Antiquities in 1952 had previously been transferred during the Indochina War

to the University of Hanoï at the request of the High Commissioner and commander-in-chief in Indochina, general de Lattre de Tassigny (Pralong 2005: 300). With the end of the Indochina War and France's withdrawal from the area, Lassus took up the post in Algeria which had been vacant since the death of the previous director Louis Leschi, who was a prominent excavator of Lambaesis (Lassus 1956: 48-49). The military command understood the value that the archaeological knowledge of landscape could provide, especially in the early stages of the war when much of the forces had only recently arrived in Algeria. In July 1955, son of the former director of excavations at Lambaesis and then also the current director, René Godet died in a helicopter crash as he was being consulted by French military officers on the layout of the roads and valleys (Heurgon 1956: 13). The 1956 report of the Director of Antiquities to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres also hinted at a difficult local situation near Lambèse during the troubled period. The Muslim site managers at both Timgad and Lambèse had so far remained at their posts (Lassus 1956: 57). Affiliations with the colonial rulers could become dangerous to local people, the position of the managers likely fell within that category, given the report's language. The dangers are well exemplified by an event in April 1958, when the town of Lambèse was targeted by an ANL action. Six communal councillors were kidnapped and later killed. The French authorities believe that the murders were committed to drive fear to prevent local councillors from cooperating with the French on developing changes to local governance structure (Huddersfield Daily Examiner 1958).

The story of the French Foreign Legion and Lambaesis run its course with the end of the War of Independence in 1962. As its result, the Legion had to withdraw from Algeria. In the west of Algeria, this meant that the troops had to abandon their main base at Sidi Bel Abbès. In the east of the country, no more Foreign Legion, or French miliary parades would take place in the ruins of Lambaesis. However, the Foreign Legion continues to retain its tradition of comparison with the Roman military, with the site of Lambaesis taking a prominent space within a recent temporary exhibition at the Foreign Legion's Museum in Aubagne, and dedicated to the comparisons between the French Foreign Legion and the Roman armies.

**Discussion**

Military-enabled exploration, conflict, resistance to alien rule and ultimately, the demise of French colonial power have framed the circumstances in which the Foreign Legion drew on Roman past to narrate its mission in Algeria. Following previous work on the Legion's interest in Lambaesis during the conquest period (Benseddik 1998; Dondin-Payre 1996; Effros 2018; Greenhalgh 2014), I have tried to show that the Legion's involvement with the site extended well into the 20th century, retaining a contemporary relevance. The examples of colonial use of Roman past presented here took place at the backdrop of pivotal historical events, including transformation of France into the Second Empire in the 19th century, the end of World War II and the Algerian War of Independence in the 20th century. Running parallel to significant historical changes, these uses of Roman past tell a local version of a much broader historical narrative. Roman past was deployed in both casual and well-planned contexts, at times in absurd ways, whilst at other times it masked uncomfortable realities of domination through violence, as we saw in the context of the parade at Lambaesis held in 1945. The principles of colonial formation of knowledge, including justification, admiration and emulation of Rome (Lorcin 2002) run central throughout the evidence.

The Foreign Legion's approach to Roman past changed over time, echoing the trajectory of use of references to Rome in French colonial discourse in North Africa overall (Lorcin 2002: 327). At first, the context in which Carbuccia and Saint-Arnauld engaged with the ruins stemmed from the circumstances of conquest, political situation in France and opportunities presented by the remains as a source of building material, and an opportunity to keep the troops and detainees occupied through excavation. The activities of the 19th century military commanders were not always consistent in terms of protection of antiquities, with the needs of the military coming first. Initiated through interest from individual officers, the use of the site in the Foreign Legion's self-narrative soon received institutional endorsement. Creation of new cultural memories drawing on Roman past was cemented through ceremonies, as is exemplified by the restitution of the tomb of Titus Flavius Maximus. This ceremony blended identification with Roman armies with cultural traditions of modern military units such as gun salutes, and the Foreign Legion specific tradition of acknowledging the ethnic character of its units. Referencing Roman past ran in parallel to the development of the cultural memory of the Foreign Legion, its identity and ethos. The Legion was created to aid France's colonial endeavour in Algeria, and its conquest was a formative period for the Legion's development (Blanchard 2017: 12-13). At the time, the Legion faced cohesion issues, and a recruitment pool influenced by political instability in Europe. Already in those early years, imagining and projecting the Legion's connection to Roman past offered an opportunity to support a sense of common identity and purpose.

By mid-twentieth century, the transnational Legion had an established set of traditions, rituals, and

cultural memories. Rather than entirely organic in their origin, these were the outcome of a strive to secure its stable future after World War I, which had left the Legion depleted, disunified and unpopular. A growing ambivalence towards the colonial project in France, secularisation of European armies and a negative German wartime propaganda targeted at the Foreign Legion necessitated an image overhaul (Porch 2010: 378, 428-433; Cooper 2006: 268). This new image provided a fertile ground for the uptake of references to Roman past. One of its pillars was resurrection of legionary symbology to project an image of an unchanging, invariable tradition and a sense of kinship with the Foreign Legion's past generations as a means of instilling values and standards of behaviour (Cooper 2006: 267-77). The Legion's identity was reinforced through a sense of shared history, collective heritage, binding myths, sacred places and objects. These principles served to sever the ties with one's culture of origin and facilitate a new sense of belonging. Whilst a legionnaire, one was deterritorialised, with the Legion serving as one's only homeland (Cooper 2006: 275). A physical shorthand for this homeland was the Legion's headquarters at Sidi Bel Abbès and its sacred Quartier Viénot. When the Algerian War of Independence started, the Legion was facing a difficult moment following the defeat in Indochina. It was in this context that the Legion made another push for reconnection with its history and tradition, offered by the necessary return to fight in Algeria, its birthplace. As the case of the 1955 military parade indicates, through a shortcut to Roman past an ancient symbolic equivalency with the Foreign Legion's headquarters was given to the ruins at Lambaesis as the base of the Roman legion. As issues of *Képi Blanc* (De Chaponniere 1955a; De Chaponniere 1955b; Képi Blanc 1956) from the first year of the war indicate, the Foreign Legion drew on Roman past by weaving references to it alongside a retelling of the Legion's foundational myth of its 1830s Algerian roots.

The second element of this institutional culture was its ethos of a spiritual mission. This relied on values of honour, sacrifice and social redemption through serving a larger, universal (Larroumet 2004: 47), and as the use of Roman past indicate, transhistorical purpose. The mission was twofold. One was that of one's own redemption through service in the Legion as a force that looked past one's background on enlistment. The other was that of serving France's 'civilising mission', offering an alternative for drafting into regular national armies. Experience of total war during World War I led to an abandonment of the myth of noble death in battle across much Europe. The Legion offered a worldview in which moral choices were less complicated, not related to the notion of fatherland, but an abstract sense of morality and duty linked to the binaries of civilisation and barbarity. Since the Legion was always at the forefront of France's overseas expansion acting in the name of this mission, it also served as a buffer between the coloniser and the colonised, occupying a liminal position of policing those perceived boundaries between civilisation and barbarity (Cooper 2006: 271-272, 281). Rome's military remains, as both European and North African at the same time lend themselves as an allegory for this type of liminality. In the eyes of military leadership, the III Augusta became a shorthand for a 20th century European army in Africa as we saw in the context of comments concerning the 3rd Alpine Infantry Division (3e DIA). The Foreign Legion was also itself 'foreign', operating as a controlled and domesticated version of the 'Other' France was seeking to civilise (Cooper 2006: 273). Such colonial worldviews are reflected in the language deployed in the Legion's coverage of its activity, with references to rebels, bandits and cruelty contrasted with the Legion's project of pacification. Echoing similar colonial language, archaeological research at the time took a decidedly pro-Roman view of relationships between Rome's armies and local communities. As we saw on the pages of the Legion's commemorative publications (Camerone 1958b), prevailing ideas about *romanization* and the role of Rome's soldiers were echoed in the Foreign Legion's version of the 'civilising mission' paradigm, presenting Rome as the Foreign Legion's role model in this regard.

Roman roots became part of an imagined past of the Foreign Legion, yet the Legion did not always retain a detailed memory of its 19th century officers' interest and excavation at Lambaesis. Professionalisation of archaeology meant that the army was no longer directly involved in excavations, although chance encounters with Roman past, whether ruins or inscriptions were still celebrated and recorded. The relationship of archaeology with colonial governance also shifted. Given the administrative situation, archaeological leadership at Lambaesis was aligned with the colonial rule. The prison situated on the archaeological site was in operation, and at least for part of the war, the archaeological site itself was under the charge of the military (Lassus 1956: 57-58). Available official photographs of the site during military ceremonies from the period of 1945 and 1962 are taken from an angle such that the Tazoult-Lambèse prison is not in the shot. While France's containment space needed to deal with dissents was kept out of the official photographs, the immediately adjacent site of Lambaesis became part of ceremonies in endorsement of French imperial tradition, which the Foreign Legion was ultimately a product of. The modern Legion did not use the site as a material resource as its 19th century predecessors did, but an ideological one.

With the Foreign Legion's recruitment base being largely European, casual references to Rome indicate a parallel between (ancient) Roman and (modern) European identities. The binary of Roman non-Roman entered the vernacular language of the war. Kemencei (1985: 313), a Hungarian NCO recalled the tactical situation in the Aurès in August 1955 in his memoir. Whilst reasoning why the South of the Aurès region proved to be less resistant to French rule and less prone to guerilla attacks, he concluded that this was the area where the French army had been established for a while and where the Romans had already been present in the past. In the description of the same events, the Algerian independence movement were said to refer to the French forces, and European men as the 'Roumis', etymologically the 'people of Rome' (Kemencei 1985: 312, 357, 364).

Polarising colonial discourse concerning Roman past left its footprint on the modern history of Lambaesis. This presents a wider question of how we negotiate contemporary understandings of Roman military sites, whose discovery and modern uses were entangled in European military action and colonisation. I have tried to show that work on contemporary colonial histories of sites such as Lambaesis is necessary to understand how knowledge about them was produced, by whom this knowledge was used and to what end, and by implication who was excluded from the process. In this regard, there are obvious limitation of presenting the Foreign Legion's own viewpoint based on evidence produced by it, even if the materials are read critically. Yet, the French Foreign Legion as both a product and the agent of French colonial thought offers a rich illustration of the issues at hand. Through conflict and occupation, the site has gained contested meanings created at the backdrop of both physical and epistemic violence. As UNESCO Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage site is planning on expansion into North Africa, the first step in the work is to be transparent about the historical complexities Roman military sites in formerly colonised by Europe countries entail.

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# The Frontiers of the Concept: Are Romanization and Islamization Comparable?

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Can we productively compare Romanization and Islamization? The answer to this question requires us to think about the way in which two expanding entities generate their borders with what is external to them. In writing these lines, I am not thinking necessarily about Rome and Islam in their sense of physical and geographical social formations, but as historical entities in (distinct) processes of growth not so much across lands, but over numbers of people (and minds). The aim of this exercise is not so much to determine if these processes are analogous. It is very clear that they are different. However, a comparison about what they implied in terms of transformations at the social and cultural level, but also about the ways in which scholars have taken up the challenge to analyse them, may offer valuable lessons to understand them on their own.

**Why this comparison?**

A comparison between Romanization and Islamization may not seem a valid academic endeavour at first sight. They are, after all, two different processes, with very distinct points of departure and points of arrival. One is about the expansion of a state, the other is about the spread of a religion (or so it seems, in a first cursory view). However, when considered as two fields of scholarly debate, it is possible to consider specific elements within them in order to understand how they work within their own fields, and hopefully to draw relevant conclusions. In this paper, I am considering Romanization and Islamization from the point of view of cultural change.

Neither Romanization nor Islamization should be defined *only* as processes of cultural change, as there is much complexity in each one of them and I do not believe that they are both commensurable with each other (more on this below). But both Romanization and Islamization *involve* processes of cultural change. In fact, it is a recurrent idea to people who are starting to address Islamization to look for similarities with the processes of Romanization.[1] The idea should not be discarded completely, as, at least with the expansion of the first Islamic polity over the Middle East and the Mediterranean, there are significant resonances with the history and culture of the Roman state. True, no one would try to compare the spread of Islam in Africa or in the Indian Ocean, for example, to the processes of expansion of the Roman state. And yet, it is understandable (if not necessarily accurate) to consider cultural change at the core of whatever Romanization and Islamization are. Therefore, I will focus my comparison on cultural change within each one of the two fields.

To produce this comparison, a brief overview of the history of the two concepts is required.

**Romanization**

Before I proceed any longer with the text, I must confess that my knowledge on Romanization theory, a field immense in its extension and in its depth, is very limited and has been gained in a very short time and with too little reading. I believe, however, that I am able to at least provide a first approach to the comparison that I propose, in the hope that it will be of interest as an exercise in comparative history (and archaeology). The lines about the history of the idea of Romanization that follow are very much indebted to the work of Astrid Van Oyen (2015), although it will be complemented with other texts to make my argument easier to follow.

The history of the concept of Romanization, a scholarly debate originally developed in Great Britain, has been marked by its beginnings in a colonialist academic context, where Classical, and particularly, Roman models were used to establish guidelines for British imperial governance and practices. This in turn meant that Romanization was understood (or needed to be understood), at its core, as a civilizational mission (*mission civilisatrice*) of a more highly developed culture over the barbarian peoples around it. Van Oyen (2015: 207-211) has shown the close relations of the imperial and the academic systems of Great Britain in the late 19th and early 20th century, the period where the concept of Romanization was born in the writings of Francis Haverfield (1912). In his view, Romanization was a unidirectional process, with a given set of dynamics where non-Roman peoples simply assimilated what the Romans gave, and the logical outcome was homogenization under the Roman models. This perspective was plainly in line with the

[1] This is mostly done in an informal way, as a thought exercise. For a particular example of this way of thinking that has been conserved in writing, see Heidemann 2020.

paradigm of cultural evolutionism and emerging in a historical context dominated by imperialism and racism. Interestingly, Van Oyen quotes Edward Said almost in passing, to note that Romanization, like Orientalism, 'is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarships or institutions', it 'is – and does not simply represent – a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture' (1978: 12, cited in Van Oyen 2015: 208). I am interested in this awareness of the connections with the idea of Orientalism, because they play a role in the parallels between Islamization and Romanization, as I will explain below.

The strong imperialist narrative of Romanization was modified in the decades following the introduction of the concept. An interest in the attitudes of those at the receiving end of the process, the 'natives', was developed (Van Oyen presents the examples of Collingwood 1922 and Millett 1990, 2015: 211-212). This was in part a reflection on the inappropriateness of modern imperialist models to account for Roman expansionism, but also due to a genuine concern with the agency of the conquered peoples and, especially in the second half of the 20th century, the shift away from cultural-historical paradigms and the interest in economic and political structures. These narratives, however, maintained the core assumptions of Haverfield's concept of Romanization: cultural superiority of the Romans over the conquered peoples and therefore unidirectional cultural assimilation, leading to homogenization. These assumptions would only be challenged by post-colonial thought.

The impact of post-colonial theory (or theories) in the concept of Romanization was very strong, encompassing a range of ideas, not always compatible between themselves, which is difficult to summarise. Every strand of post-colonial thought has in common a rejection of 'grand narratives', of any attempt to reduce human history to a single line of development. Of course, this implies the specific discarding of any claims of cultural superiority of conquered (and colonial societies), and this is applicable to the Roman case as well. At the same time, post-colonial thought is concerned with how knowledge is created and how alternative identities (the 'Other') are used in this creative process (e.g., Bhabha 1994; Said 1978; Spivak 1988). In the field of Romanization, Van Oyen (2015: 213-219) suggests three main results of the impact of post-colonial thought. The first one was the development of *anti-colonialism*, as a result of nativists views that focus their interest in the study of local indigenous cultures dominated by the Romans. Romanization here was considered as a process of imposition of new cultural standards which the 'natives' naturally resisted (e.g., Bénabou 1976). Deeply influenced by criticism of French and American imperialism during the 1970s and 1980s, anti-colonialism tended to develop in a very anti-imperialist framework, and therefore maintains the essentialism of the first concept of Romanization (Romans and natives) but inverts the order of priorities of study. This has been criticised with good reason, to the point that for some authors anti-colonialism should be considered apart from post-colonial thought. Miguel John Versluys (2014: 2-3) argues that post-colonialism in the Romanization debate very soon developed in anti-colonialism, because it never ended dissolving the dichotomy Roman-native, and thus he seems to consider them clearly distinct; Peter van Dommelen (2014: 41-44) complements this perspective by providing a detailed historiography of the nativist turn in the disciplines of history and archaeology, that shares roots, but is also clearly distinct from post-colonial thought.

Another result of post-colonial thought in the Romanization debate was *creolization*, inspired on the works of Homi Bhabha (1997). Creolization theories aimed to understand Romanization under the perspective of imitation of the dominant culture with the intention of creating a third space where meanings are created by local communities without control of the colonial authority. The problem with this strand of post-colonial thought applied to Romanization is that it requires a substantial work of contextualisation, and Van Oyen can only find only one example of study that applies this perspective: Webster (2001), with results that are well intended but not fully successful.

The third and last strand of post-colonial thought in the Romanization debate was the use of the concept of 'discrepant identities', taken from Said's *Culture and imperialism* (1993: 35-50) by David Mattingly's study on identity of the Iron-Age societies of Roman Britain (2004). This work focuses on the diversity of the archaeological record to try to locate identities that are often overlooked, but at the same time considers practice as the key to understand subaltern spaces where meaning is generated. In spite of strong constraints of the evidence, Van Oyen believes that there is much to praise in Mattingly's work, but she also believes that the concept of identity in Roman archaeology has some problems, particularly when it is used as an emic rather than as etic category, taking to the past concepts and ideas that belong to the present, and in some cases reinstating the Roman-native dichotomy.

The difficulties of scholars to find an adequate way to frame Romanization in categories of post-colonial thought have led to a loss of faith in the concept itself, to the point where scholars have suggested that it should be entirely discarded. While acknowledging the pitfalls of the debate, Versluys (2014) suggests not to discard the concept, but to reframe it completely

('*Romanization 2.0*') with the use of globalization theory, and in particular the concept of *glocalization*, and with the latest trends of archaeological theory where ideas about Romanization are discussed with more direct emphasis on materials. A pioneering analysis of globalization theory in terms of the Roman world was Richard Hingley's work, that reconsidered the meaning of 'empire' and 'imperialism' in the Roman world, and in particular the connection between how these concepts are conceived by scholars and examined by a wider public in the context of current socio-politics (2005). A different line of globalization theory is taken up by Martin Pitts and M.J. Versluys (2015), who call for overcoming the distinction between Romans and natives by opening new themes of research on Romanization inspired in the work of Arjun Appadurai (2011): convergence, unevenness and glocalization (Pitts and Versluys 2015: 13-15). The main criticism that this approach has raised is the fact that it tends to focus on connectivity and networks, which have positive connotations, and seem to be leaving aside the darker aspects of Romanization, such as imperialism and violence. In a more recent work, Versluys (2021) tried to integrate discussions of hard power within a perspective of Roman imperialism and globalization by developing the concept of *friction* inspired by the work of Anna Tsing in Indonesia (2005). His suggestion is that the friction between the different networks of power and culture makes cultural change and thus Romanization possible. From this perspective, Roman imperialism is not something that can be dismissed when considering the Roman world under globalization theory, because it is the result (the answer) of the Roman structures of power towards the frictions caused by the interlocking of different networks and scales.

In terms of the influence of the latest trends in archaeological theory and their impact on the Romanization debate, it is perhaps too early still to see how deep the mark of this venue will be, but some studies show interesting results. The main aspect of this venue is probably the ontological turn in archaeology, which calls for a reconsideration of the boundaries of things and actors, enabling the consideration of relationships beyond the traditional pathways (*relationality*). Van Oyen pioneered this approach in 2013 with a study that called to break down traditional pottery typologies in favour of analysis of the production of meaning of those objects through the processes of production and consumption. In a similar line, M. Pitts and M.J. Versluys (2021) introduced the concept of *objectscapes* to extend the inquest about relationality and meaning to a wider set of material culture, and with a more specific development of the genealogy of such an approach. The most recent approach in this line is Eva Mol's study of Roman ontological fluidity (2023), where the latest post-humanist and new materialist theories are mobilised to discuss inequality and slavery.

When looking at the history of the debate, one cannot but think that the framework of the concept of Romanization itself has been shaken to its core due to the introduction of post-colonial thought. Although I am convinced that Roman scholars are better positioned to find the reasons, I will offer an idea of why below, after I introduce Islamization.

**Islamization**

In the Western conception of history (and this is an important position to remember), Islamization was never conceived as a *mission civilisatrice*, in the same way as Romanization.[2] Islam, with its double character of religion and civilization, was difficult to pin down with a definition (more on this below), but it was generally agreed that it was an Other, an outsider to the civilizational development of Europe and the West (the words of Said 1978: 12, referenced by Van Oyen 2015: 208, and repeated above, must be brought here as well). The idea of the expansion of Islam, therefore, did not come as a logical development, and needed other forms of explanation. To present an excellent example, in his study of the Islamization of East Bengal, Richard Eaton classified (and accurately criticised) the four main types of narratives used to explain the expansion of Islam in the Indian subcontinent: migration, violent imposition, political interest and social liberation. Leaving aside the option of migration, the only one created by Muslims born in India, all the other narratives were created by Western or Western-educated scholars (Eaton 1993: 113-119). Migration is of course the only narrative which, even if historically incorrect, assumes the expansion of Islam as a logical follow-up of contact with Muslims. In the rest of the narratives, people need to be coerced or to see a social advantage to become Muslims.

The problem of Islamization, to a large extent, is that the idea of what Islam is remains elusive, precisely because everyone assumes to know what it is. In most historical works, Islamization and Islam are not defined in depth, and it is assumed that Islamization is the same as conversion. This is often a form of avoiding

[2] With the possible exception of Spain, where a positive and nationalist conception of 'Spanish Muslim' civilization (*civilización hispanomusulmana*) was hold since at least the 18th century as a way to incorporate the splendour of al-Andalus as part of the Spanish national past (Monroe 1970). This conception was by no means hegemonic at all times and not necessarily at odds with Orientalist and racist tropes (cf. Carvajal López 2020), but it did exist. In contrast, note the almost complete erasure of the Islamic history of countries in the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans, where colonial and anti-colonial archaeologists preferred to focus on other periods of history to fix 'national' histories (Carvajal López *et al.* 2020)

the question of what changes with Islam: conversion is individual, and if there is any kind of cultural change, then it is due to a different root cause *that is not Islam*. The most important work considering Islamization recently, Peacock's edited volume on *Islamisation* (2016a) opens the question, but, after a careful consideration and insightful points, restates the equivalence between Islamization and conversion as the best possible definition, albeit with resignation (Peacock 2016b: 1-14).

In spite of the focus on conversion by most scholars, some works have considered the social implications of Islamization. Famously, Richard Bulliet's work (1979) laid down some important social bases for his proposal on how conversion to Islam historically worked in the early Islamic period, thus effectively describing Islamization processes. He proposed two axioms to make this change socially acceptable: that the new religion offered similar conditions to the religion that was being left behind, and that there was no significant loss of social status as a consequence of the conversion. In the context that Bulliet was considering, the late antique Middle East and Mediterranean, this could be translated in an urban-based culture with elaborate and complex religious structures. In a similar vein, Manuel Acién considered that the Islamization of the Iberian Peninsula, al-Andalus, was essentially equivalent to a social transformation, the main agent of which was the Umayyad state of Cordoba (Acién 1994). In a recent restatement of Acien's theory, this process of social Islamization consisted in the creation of an Islamicate way of life (*modo de vida islamizado*[3]) following Oriental models that arrived in Iberia via North Africa (López Martínez de Marigorta 2020). Indeed, it can be said that both Bulliet's and Acién's models of Islamization fit well within the framework of Islamicate culture proposed by Marshall Hodgson in his monumental *Venture of Islam* (1974). Hodgson differentiated between Islamic and Islamicate, with the former adjective used for purely religious fields (i.e., numinous, theological and even normative) and the latter for the culture associated to historical Islamic-period social formations, where non-Muslim population was more or less relevant, and which tended to be identified with an urban, cosmopolitan and even multi-cultural civilization. There is much overlap between Hodgson's conceptions of an Islamic/Islamicate society and Bulliet's and Acién's works, even if they do not reference him. However, there are differences too. While Hodgson dedicated his work to explore the connection between Islamic and Islamicate, Bulliet (implicitly) and Acién (more openly) conflated Islam with Islamicate culture[4]. In their defence, it must be said that their proposals to understand Islamization were very bright, but that their problem is that they failed to understand that there needs to be a difference between a general concept (what Islam is) and the shape that Islam takes in a particular historical formation. This is a critique that cannot be addressed to Hodgson, but that does not mean that we need to accept his separation between Islamic and Islamicate either.

The most relevant criticism to Hodgson's 'Islamic-Islamicate' separation is Shahad Ahmed's *What is Islam?* (2016), a book dealing with the post-colonial themes of identity and meaning in which the author, however, does not hide his admiration for Hodgson's conscientious work. The problem with Hodgson's idea, Ahmed says, is that the separation that he proposes creates a sliding slope which he avoids, but which is a problem for his followers. In distinguishing Islamicate from Islamic, the former becomes identified with non-religious (secular), open-minded and cosmopolitan culture, and the latter with 'the' religion, Islam, which is conceived essentially as a set of norms that define orthodoxy around which people are positioned by the observer. Ahmed objects on two grounds. The first one is that the separation between secular and religious spheres is problematic beyond secular Western societies, and in pre-industrial Islamic societies. The second objection is that the conception of Islam as orthodoxy is incorrect. For Ahmed, Islam must be understood from a hermeneutical point of view: Islam is what Muslims do to understand and explore the meaning of the Revelation of God to the Prophet Muhammad, and at the same time is the medium, created by other Muslims, in which this exploration takes place. This hermeneutical activity shapes the meaning of actions in the world, and the world itself, of the Muslims, but also of non-Muslims, who are affected by the actions made with Islamic meaning, and may even 'adopt' (i.e., commit to) Islamic meanings while performing actions in the world, even if those actions are made with other meanings too ('The act is one, the categorical meanings of the act are more than one', says Ahmed 2016: 446). The separation between Islamicate and Islamic culture is not necessary: all the actions taken to create these two fields can be understood as 'Islamic' in the sense in which, performed by Muslims or by non-Muslims, they were interpreted to make sense in a context (or Con-Text, according to Ahmed) where the Revelation of God to Muhammad is a fact. The Islamic meaning of these actions can be orthodox or unorthodox, it can be contradictory and paradoxical, but they all make sense in the same context of 'mutual intelligibility' (Ahmed 2016: 142), not necessarily of agreement. In this elegant way Ahmed renders the concept of Islamicate

[3] The translation of 'Islamicate' to '*islamizado*' is suggested by López Martínez de Marigorta himself (2020).

[4] It is fair to note that there are significant differences in the way in which Hodgson and Acién conceived this distinction between Islamic and Islamicate: for Hodgson, it is akin to a Bordieuan distinction, based on the *habitus* and on practice, while for Acién (who did not speak of Islamicate, but of 'social Islamization') the difference is better understood in Marxist terms of ideology and infrastructure.

unnecessary and provides a fundamental opening of the question of Islamization to post-colonialism. His eye-opening perspective was additionally one of the foundations of my own contribution to the debate, *Archaeology and Islamization* (2023), where I proposed a new materialist approach to the question. My suggestion is that Islamization is not (necessarily or only) the process by which a community goes from being non-Muslim to being Muslim, but rather the process of creation of a context for giving Revelation-related meaning to the world.

In this cursory overview of Islamization, several differences emerge with the history of the concept of Romanization. I am interested in particular in the consequences of the arrival of post-colonial thought into the field. While Islamization found in it new ways of expression and development, Romanization was shaken to its core. This is not to say that the idea of Romanization must be abandoned, or that it cannot benefit from post-colonial ideas; this is clearly not happening. But it is interesting that post-colonialism was received in very different ways in each one of the fields. In my opinion, this is due to the fact that Rome was located within the flow of history of the grand narrative of the West, and therefore Romanization (the move to become Roman) was considered a logical development. Islam and Islamization, however, needed to be explained in a very different way: they needed to be given a meaning (that was understandable for the Western mindset). Postcolonial thought broke the Western grand narrative, and placed Rome and Romanization in a position like that of Islamization, where it had not been before. In this way, scholars dealing with Romanization were forced to cope, for the first time, with the question of the meaning of cultural change.

## The meaning of cultural change in Romanization and in Islamization

When using the concept of meaning in this section I am borrowing an idea used by Ahmed in his work of *What is Islam?* As explained above, Ahmed defines as actions imbued with 'Islamic meaning' all those linked ultimately to explore the meaning of the Revelation in the world (2016: 362). This Islamic meaning provides a shared intelligibility, even if the actions within it are contradictory. If, with the permission of my fellow scholars of the Roman world, I dare to apply the same idea to Romanization, surely 'Roman meaning' would be characteristic of actions aimed to explore the meaning of the (idea of the) Roman state in the world. This does not mean, of course, to support or to justify it; it means to produce meaningful actions that share a common intelligibility of its significance in the world. Thus, there is an essential difference in intelligibility between Romanization and Islamization. In the former case, the creation of intelligible meaning links ultimately to the actions of a specific material entity, the Roman state. Islamization is quite different in this aspect. The generation of intelligible meaning within Islam depends on a different kind of concept, the Revelation. The Revelation is in itself less material than the Roman state, but precisely because its acceptance as a truth is the defining characteristic of Muslims, it is present in every one of them in a particularly different way. This means that Romanization and Islamization are not commensurable.

This incommensurability generates some interesting effects. For starters, the boundedness of the cultural change associated with Romanization and Islamization is very different. This difference plays on two grounds: the first one is temporal. Both Romanization and Islamization happen on very different historical scales. Romanization is linked to the existence of the Roman state and the creation of meaning within it cannot happen without it. Therefore, the end of the Roman state implied that Romanization could not continue. Islamization has a different temporal framework, because the Revelation keeps happening as long as Muslims believe in it, and therefore Islamization is longer (and indeed, it keeps on nowadays). This produces a paradoxical effect on the analysis of cultural changes within each one of the two fields. Since Romanization is well delimited in a historical period, archaeologists have little difficulty in defining a set of material culture as 'characteristically Roman'. The same cannot be said about Islamization, because it encompasses a much wider range of historical and geographical scenarios.[5] This distinction, however, is only secondary, because the diversity in boundedness is not due to the differences in scale. This is an idea that needs to be rejected. If it was a matter of scale, then Romanization and Islamization would be commensurable. The concept 'Rome', therefore, could be elevated to a higher order to be of the same measure as the concept 'Islam'. In fact, this is what Huntingdon proposed when he opposed 'civilizations', of which one (the West) represents the inheritance of Rome (among others), and can be compared against Islam, one of the Others (Huntingdon 1993). The incommensurability is not a matter of scale, but it is, instead, rooted in intelligibility. To be sure, differences in scale are due to differences in boundedness, and differences in boundedness are ultimately caused by distinct roots of intelligibility.

Despite the incommensurability of cultural change in Romanization and Islamization, of the different roots

[5] And this is why it has been contentious to link cultural change and Islamization, and scholars have preferred to assume that Islamization is the same as conversion.

their intelligible meaning, it is possible to compare the ways in which links between actions and meanings are established in each one of them.

## Comparability despite incommensurability. Post-colonialism again

The above conclusions should not be taken as a discouragement to any attempt to establish significant comparisons between Rome and Islam, or between Romanization and Islamization. As long as the root causes of the incommensurability are clear, scholars can work out ways to understand how actions and meanings are linked in each one of the fields (and how these links change, to allow for Romanization and Islamization).

This is more complicated than it seems. The relationship between meaning and action is not that of a simple pairing. A better way to establish it is to state that meaning is codified in actions or sets of actions with a particular sense or direction to modify the world.[6] A worthy comparison, then, should establish how the sense of the actions is connected to their meaning in the context of intelligibility that is being considered. So for example, comparing the state apparatus of the Romans and of the early Islamic state over which the Umayyad dynasty reigned shows a set of actions aimed to build and channel political power, but the sources of the authority, and ultimately, of the meaning of that power are very different in each case, which accounts for a very different perception of the world.

Of course, colonialism (and post-colonialism) also play a role here. The perception of the sense of actions is also dependent on our cultural context. The historical context in which the question of Romanization emerged, well explained by Van Oyen (2015: 207-209) influenced not only the way in which the question was addressed and answered, but, more importantly, why it was that question, and no other, that was set. Placing imperialism at the root of a process of social development (i.e., cultural change with a positive outcome) contributed to strengthen not only the core values of colonialism itself, but also of the (benevolent) Empire as the ultimate form of human organization (Hingley 2005). To be sure, whatever our stance on Rome, it was a human organization that shared many traits with the Empire. To put it in another way, there was a large share of meaningful actions of the Romans that were easy to understand to Edwardian and Victorian (and later) scholars. This is why Romanization was a relevant question. But this is also why other roots of intelligibility, such as Islam, became such a conundrum. Victorians and its successors, Western scholars, never developed an appropriate framework to understand mentalities other than Western Christianity (cf. Asad 1993). The exposition of the roots of intelligibility of Empire, and the need to find roots of intelligibility of the Other, precisely by post-colonial thinkers, opened new scenarios. This is a second reason why post-colonialism was so destabilizing for the project of Romanization. However, I also believe, with all the cautions required by an external observer, that the scholarly debate on Romanization has much to gain by addressing meaning, as in fact I believe it has started to do already a while ago. Indeed, if this comparison has served for anything (to me, at least), it is that scholars on Islamization have some things to learn from our colleagues who deal with Romanization.

## Conclusion: mainly on Islamization

While I hope that this paper is interesting for experts on Romanization, I would like to offer a brief conclusion with an eye on my own field, Islamization.

This paper started as an exploration of two (apparently) parallel fields with the expectation to show that parallelism would be less important than divergences. It was surprising to me to find that, while indeed Romanization and Islamization are hermeneutically distant fields, there are some (let's say) moral parallels to be drawn. In the paper, I hope to have shown the reasons why I think the study of intelligible meaning makes clear why Romanization and Islamization are incommensurable. Yet, at the same time the two can be compared in the way in which meaning, and actions are linked. This comparison shows the impact of post-colonialism at large in the field of Romanization, but it also demonstrates its impact *on Islamization*. The fact that scholars of Romanization were able to feel the floor shaking under their feet denotes a level of awareness that most of us, experts on Islamization, will need to work on. What we learn from our colleagues may speed up our own journey. In this sense, the suggestions that Versluys made already a decade ago (2014), that is, to restart the debate from the points of view of globalization and relationality.

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[6] This is a very simplified explanation of a very complex process, due to lack of space. What I am trying to address here is the duality between territorialization and coding of Deleuzean philosophy, where territorialization represents the relationships between actions and coding the meaning that emerges of these relationships. I have taken these ideas from Harris 2021: 61-68 and references therein. I have applied these ideas to Islamization with more detail in my work of 2023.

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# Reflections on 'Writing the Legions': Roman Military Scholarship

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**Introduction**

In 2002, Simon James published a paper on Roman frontier studies in Britain, and their seeming isolation from more mainstream Roman archaeology. One of the reasons for this was cited as the 'Durham School' centred on Professor Eric Birley's significant contribution to scholarship on the Roman army and wider frontier studies, and the impact of the student cohort that he produced. The aim of this paper is to consider some of the cultural relativism that created this divergence and some of the challenges and legacies today. This includes the dominance of several male scholars of archaeology based in universities in southern England at that time as well as different approaches to dissemination.

**North versus South**

'Until the 1960s, there was a physical gap, and it seems a growing gulf of comprehension, between the Roman scholars of Oxford, Cambridge and London in the South, and those of the northern schools — in Scotland, Durham and Newcastle. The divergence of North and South was reinforced by differing philosophies among practitioners, and personality clashes.' James 2002, 14-15.

That there is a 'golden triangle' of Oxford, Cambridge and London has long been recognised. This is seen in a dominance of research funding as well as financial endowments for prestigious institutions. Whilst medical research forms a significant part of this, there is a knock-on effect into other disciplines and arguably it has skewed perceptions of significance of different Universities. Even for institutions out with those named in the 'triangle', proximity to the south-east of England where wealth and population are the largest across the UK contributes to this north-south divide. The new East-West Rail link between Oxford and Cambridge reinforces this bias. The perceived lack of 'Levelling Up' elsewhere in Britain is having an impact on politics and voter patterns.

In writing this paper, I must recognise my own bias. Born and with my childhood spent in southern England, I moved north in my late teens, studying Ancient History and Archaeology at Newcastle University (where Charles Daniels was the dominant Romanist) and later undertook a part-time PhD on Roman archaeology with Bill Hanson at Glasgow University. I regularly collaborate with David Breeze, one of the products of the 'Durham School'. Most of my career has been in Scottish archaeology and my research interests lie in Roman frontiers and military archaeology (e.g. Jones 2011; 2012). In the context of north versus south, I have to declare my northern allegiance.

Politics and context do play a role in a discipline like archaeology; whether we like to consider our work divorced from politics, in reality there are always huge political influences at play. Considering the historiography of our subject, is the visibility of relativism any surprise? Some of the 'military men' involved in the wars of the 20th century were key figures in influencing our understanding of Roman military archaeology in Britain. When we look at heritage in the 21st century, the politicisation of the subject is clear, whether from the creation of the Scottish parliament in 1999 through to the independence referendum of 2014 and beyond; and the discussions around the Brexit referendum of 2016. Examples in Scotland include new visitor centres at Culloden and Bannockburn; as well as more emphasis on our deep time connections to our European neighbours, whether this has been conscious or subconscious. Museums across the UK have become more aware of their collections, with repatriation of artefacts a hot topic. Climate change and the scientific evidence for people's reactions to climatic changes in the past are an active subject of research (e.g. Turney *et al.* 2016). Cultural relativism is alive and well: actions, activities and assumptions are a product of their time (James 2002, 7), their zeitgeist (Breeze 2018a).

**Early relativism**

Thinking back to some of the early research on the Romans in northern Britain, in the military frontier zones, some of the key antiquarians of the 18th century were men of the army (e.g. Generals Robert Melville and William Roy: Jones and Maxwell 2008) following the campaigns of the Roman forces. Fast forward to the Victorian period, an era of discovery and exploration, it is no surprise that an increased interest in the 'local' archaeology in Britain developed, rather than that of the 'invaders', leading to improved understanding of prehistory. The ease of rail and road travel enabled scholars from the south to work in the north. One dominant character from the late Victorian era was Francis Haverfield, who undertook significant excavations on the vallum of Hadrian's Wall

in 1894-1903 and was an academic who studied and subsequently taught at Oxford University.

Haverfield is seen as a pioneer of Romano-British archaeology, with a legacy acknowledged over a century after his death, including the still growing corpus of Roman Inscriptions in Britain (Freeman 2007; Collingwood and Wright 1965). One of his key collaborators on the vallum excavations was Elizabeth Hodgson, a local landowner in Cumbria and a member of the Cumberland Excavation Committee under whose auspices the work was conducted. Yet the work of Mrs Hodgson, an 'unprofessional professional' to quote a term used by Díaz-Andreu and Stig Sørensen (1998, 11), has largely disappeared from consciousness, although there are now efforts to redress the narrative (e.g. Breeze 2014; Breeze 2024). The dominance of male academics based in southern Britain had commenced.

**Between the wars**

Whilst James has observed that the heyday of the 'Durham school' was after the 2nd world war, the seeds were sown in the interwar period, with significant work on the Romans in northern Britain undertaken by Eric Birley (educated at Oxford then moved through field work to Durham where he stayed), Ian Richmond (educated at Oxford, worked in Belfast, Rome and Durham (Newcastle) before returning to Oxford), F G Simpson (originally an engineer, became Director of field studies at Durham), George Macdonald (educated at Edinburgh and Oxford, worked in Glasgow and the civil service) and Robin G Collingwood (Oxford). The Oxford influence is clear.

This Oxford influence can be traced back to Haverfield. He was a friend and near contemporary of George Macdonald (later Sir) who was to become his literary executor (Freeman 2007, 165). Macdonald's work towers over the archaeology of the Antonine Wall, the Roman frontier in Scotland. One of Haverfield's key students at Oxford was the archaeologist and philosopher Robin G Collingwood. In turn, Collingwood was a significant influence on both Ian Richmond and Eric Birley. He wrote Roman Britain and the English Settlements with Richmond in 1936. Richmond subsequently went on to produce a revised edition of the 'Archaeology of Roman Britain' posthumously in 1969; Collingwood introduced Birley to Hadrian's Wall (Wilkes 1995). Curiously, Collingwood, Richmond and Birley were all born in Lancashire, so had northern origins in common which may have been a partial draw towards the study of the archaeology of northern England. They all came from wealthy families, the children of an artist, doctor and mill owner respectively, educated at private schools. Whilst Collingwood's first love was philosophy and Richmond was to work in a variety of different parts of Britain (and occasionally overseas), once he started examining the monument, Birley never really left Hadrian's Wall and Roman army studies.

During the 20th century, the university subject of archaeology in Britain grew out of the sister subjects of classics and history to emerge as a discipline. Its growth from classics was through a developing interest in the archaeology of Greece and Rome (with the British School of Athens founded in 1886 after those of France, Germany and the US; and the British School at Rome founded somewhat later, in 1901).

This influence of Oxford University on the archaeology of Roman Britain is significant. Cambridge's influence was there, but it was less significant in relation to Roman archaeology at that time. The first two Laurence Professors of Classical archaeology at Cambridge (1930s & 1940s) had strong scholarship in Greek literature and archaeology. The third – A W Lawrence – had archaeological interests which went far beyond the classical world, also working in Ghana and west Africa. The fourth – Jocelyn Toynbee, to this date the only female to hold this position – studied at Cambridge and Oxford, completing her PhD on Hadrianic Art at the latter in 1930. Although her archaeological interests were through the study of Roman artistic representations rather than active fieldwork, was the strong reputation of Oxford for Roman studies a factor in her choosing to study for her PhD there? Or was it because they were awarding degrees to women at this point, unlike Cambridge (which didn't award degrees to women until 1948)?

This interwar period also saw the rise in the dominance in archaeology of Mortimer Wheeler. In 1934, together with his wife Tessa, he set up a centre for training in archaeological studies: the Institute for Archaeology in London. Wheeler excavated several Roman sites in Britain in a long career which also took him to India and Pakistan. Arguably the most famous archaeologist of the 20th century, Wheeler's dominance is well known, alongside a forceful personality, seemingly attractive to the media and with a talent for public archaeology and promoting the past.

**Birley and his 'Durham school'**

For contemporary archaeologists of the pre- and post-war period, Wheeler's dominance must have been self-evident. Archaeology had grown beyond classics and other origins in places like Cambridge, Edinburgh, Oxford, Liverpool and Cardiff (Smith 2004, 1). Some universities looked out with their institutions for appointments (e.g. Edinburgh appointing the Australian Vere Gordon Childe to the newly created Abercromby Chair of Prehistoric Archaeology) whereas

others preferred to appoint posts from within, even with archaeology as a new discipline. It is reported that, in 1939, Cambridge preferred to appoint a woman to the Disney Chair in Archaeology (Dorothy Garrod – the first female Chair at Oxbridge) over a 'candidate from outside'. Given that women could not graduate from Cambridge at this time, this must have been sacrilegious! It is thought that this outside candidate was Wheeler, seen as not a 'Cambridge man' (Daniel 1986, 97; Smith 2004, 212-3). In the 1950s, Wheeler became a household name through the television series 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', awarded the title of TV personality of the year in 1954. (That award subsequently went to one of his co-stars on the panel – the Cambridge academic Glyn Daniel – in 1955.) The show ran for seven years. Although some of the northern archaeologists of the time did occasionally appear on the show – notably Stuart Piggott from Edinburgh University – it was dominated by Daniel and Wheeler from Cambridge and London, the golden triangle in action.

When we consider the dominant individuals who may have established some form of a university 'school' of archaeology (if we can call it such) in a similar time period to Birley, particularly in the post-war period, the ones that spring to mind are Childe who had moved from Edinburgh to London (Professor 1946-56, then replaced by W F Grimes), Stuart Piggott at Edinburgh (Abercromby Professor 1946-1977), Grahame Clark at Cambridge (Disney Professor 1952-1974, continuing work started by Garrod), Christopher Hawkes at Oxford (Professor of European Archaeology 1946-1972) and, from 1958, Richard J. C. Atkinson as the first Professor of Archaeology at Cardiff (1958-1983). All these other leading men had research interests in prehistory. Richmond's time was split between Newcastle (1935-1956) then Oxford, where he became Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Empire from 1956 until his sudden death in 1965. Potentially because he moved Universities, he may not have had quite the same impact on a 'school' of graduate students in the same manner as Birley, despite supervising some notable individuals (e.g. Barri Jones, later Professor at Manchester). In an obituary of Richmond written by Wheeler, he commented that Richmond's 'place lies in the direct line of descent from R G Collingwood and, behind him, Francis Haverfield, who made Roman Britain a specifically Oxford tradition' (1965, x). Freeman also saw Collingwood and Richmond as the next major figures in Romano-British archaeology after Haverfield (Freeman 2007, 35). Despite his untimely early death, Richmond left a significant legacy of excavation reports and research.

One of the comments that James makes about Birley was his predominant interest in the Roman military whereas near contemporaries like Mortimer Wheeler and Ian Richmond excavated both military and civil sites (2002, 4). Richmond's successor at Oxford, Sheppard Frere, also excavated both (although it is worth noting that Birley's pre-World War II excavations at the civil settlement at Housesteads were pioneering at that time (Birley and Keeney 1935)). James observes that this was in part due to 'the perception of distinct civil and military zones in Roman Britain, and partly from the influence of prominent figures in setting academic agendas' (2002, 4). Birley's focus on Hadrian's Wall and northern military archaeology did produce a slew of scholars who have immeasurably increased our understanding of Roman frontiers and the wider Roman military. James referred to it as pursuing 'a set of aims and strategies unusual in the overtness of their articulation... defining what was studied, and .... implicitly determined what was not studied' (2002, 3).

If we consider Birley's key interests prior to World War II, these included Roman pottery, Hadrian's Wall, inscriptions, excavations at Vindolanda, Housesteads and Birrens, and the units on Hadrian's Wall (Breeze, pers. comm.). Time spent in London in the 1920s observing construction sites led to his love for samian: 'his photographic memory, a blessing and a curse, was ideal for recognising the shapes and patterns on decorated vessels. A perpetual jigsaw in his mind'. (Andrew Birley, pers.comm.)

After the war, his interests remained broadly on the Roman army, but with a preference for prosopography. His role in the field school at Corbridge, which he started together with Richmond in 1936, changed post-war with a move away from leading excavations to a focus on the finds from the site. Richmond and Gillam were the principal site directors from 1946. Birley's last excavation appears to have been at Brough under Stainmore in 1954 (Breeze, pers. comm.). It is possible that his experience of World War II led him to re-focus his efforts on the wider Roman army and its organisation over the excavation and study of Hadrian's Wall. This was at a time when it was thought that all the major questions about the wall had been solved.

Also, did Birley really determine what was not studied? His students continued to excavate at Corbridge and elsewhere despite his own cessation of excavation. His own interests certainly were an influence on his students. Together with John Gillam, his effective replacement as site director, he published the mortarium stamps from Corbridge (Birley and Gillam 1948). Gillam's subsequent significant contribution to Roman pottery studies is well known (e.g. Dore and Greene 1977). Birley's student Grace Simpson's work on samian, particularly Central Gaulish Potters (Stanfield and Simpson 1958), is an essential reference work even today. Maurice Callender made an important contribution to amphorae studies

(Callender 1965). That these former students continued their pottery studies after Durham perhaps reflects Birley's distillation of his enthusiasm and teaching for the subject to subsequent generations.

In Roman army studies, his students have made an exceptional contribution to knowledge. These include Brian Dobson, Val Maxfield, David Breeze, Jim Summerly and Roy Davies. For other provinces and aspects of the Roman Empire we have Mike Jarrett, John Wilkes and Richard Harper. This is just to name a few of the many people whom Birley taught who remained active in Roman archaeology. There were a few women. Grace Simpson and Val Maxfield have already been mentioned. We can add Brenda Swinbank / Heywood's work on the vallum of Hadrian's Wall (e.g. Heywood and Breeze 2008). In his volume on Research on Hadrian's Wall, Birley named a number of his pupils who had helped him better understand the subject, five of whom were women (1961, vii-viii). That few of them had subsequent careers in archaeology was as much to do with post-war conservatism in Britain and domestication of women, particularly those who married (Pope 2011, 69; Jones and Ivleva forthcoming). Yet, the fact that there was both a camaraderie and a good gender balance is self-evident in the photographs that Brenda Heywood (then Brenda Swinbank) took in 1949-50 (Figure 1). As with today's archaeology graduates, not all stayed in the subject, but it presumably was a university degree which was a stepping stone to other careers and interests. In Brian Fagan's biography of Grahame Clark, he highlights an assumption of Cambridge University in the inter-war years that many of their students were destined for careers as colonial administrators (2001, 15-16).

At a time of dominant forceful individuals, usually men, in university academic departments, it is perhaps no surprise that Birley in effect created the same at Durham? Particularly with Childe in London, Clark in Cambridge, and Hawkes in Oxford, three prehistorians based in that golden triangle. Whilst not all have been described as 'schools' in the same way as the 'Durham school' by James, they also set agendas for research influenced by the interests of an individual and produced notable scholars of that discipline.

How was Birley's 'Durham School' viewed by his contemporaries? That he was close to Richmond is well known; apparently, he helped secure Richmond a role at Durham (Newcastle) on the latter's return from the British School of Rome in the 1930s, even housing him at Chesterholm for several months (Andrew Birley, pers.comm.). But in Birley's retrospectives of the Limes Congress, Richmond gets a short mention, noting that he helped organise that first congress of 1949 (Birley 1974, 4). Over time, the two men had gone their separate ways with their relationship not what it once had been.

Figure. 1. A photograph by Brenda Swinbank (front row, centre) of her contemporaries at Hadrian's Wall, 1949/50 (photograph courtesy of Suzanne and Simon Heywood and the Heywood family).

Birley was not particularly political in his approach to archaeology, unlike many of his contemporaries.

Birley and Wheeler were known to one another, particularly from Birley's time working in London in the late 1920s (Dobson 1998). Birley invited Wheeler to attend the inaugural congress of Roman frontier studies in Newcastle in 1949 (Birley 1952; Breeze *et al.* 2024) and Wheeler is name checked as an influence in some of Birley's obituaries (e.g. Wilkes 1995; Dobson 1998). Curiously, Birley is not even mentioned in Wheeler's own autobiography (1955) nor in his later biography (Hawkes 1982). Given that Wheeler did work on Roman military sites, was Birley's 'Durham School' viewed differently? Was his focus too narrow given the sweeping overviews being produced in other periods, particularly prehistory? Or was he too far north? Birley was prolific in publishing in the 'local' journals produced by the societies at either end of Hadrian's Wall (Archaeologia Aeliana and the Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society). James' apparent criticism of the Durham school is also around the focus on data (typology and function) and a lack of theory. Yet in the 1920s and 1930s, prehistory had been dominated by typologies of artefacts, particularly flints (Fagan 2001, 62) so Birley's work was not wildly different when considering contemporary archaeological activity between the wars. It was rashly believed in the 1930s that the problems of Hadrian's Wall had been solved (Breeze 2014, 143). But there was perhaps more divergence between Roman military archaeology and prehistory after World War II. Indeed, Roman military studies have been late to join in wider theoretical discourse in archaeology, including Roman archaeology, but there has been some catching up in recent years, partly thanks to James and the 'school' at Leicester.

## Academic 'schools'

What defines a research 'school' of archaeology? In her work on prehistory at Cambridge, Pamela Jane Smith has drawn attention to a research school comprising 'a focused research programme, a pool of recruits, new exploitable techniques, new fields of research and a publication outlet', building on earlier work on university disciplines (Smith 2004, 14). Applying this and the factors of success or failure of research schools by Geison (1981), the Durham School sits comfortably alongside those operating in the 1950s and 1960s elsewhere (e.g. Cambridge and London, possibly less so at Oxford and also Edinburgh, Ian Ralston pers. comm.). But a key difference is in the application of techniques and the expansion to new fields of research. As James argues, Birley was the key person working on Roman military studies in northern Britain (2002, 2-3). His students (sometimes called 'disciples') have dominated studies of the Roman military archaeology of northern Britain. Given that his university-based contemporaries in Britain were either working on prehistoric studies or Roman archaeology elsewhere, it is perhaps no surprise that his key peers were those working on frontiers abroad, notably Germany. The premature death of Richmond robbed the discipline of the growth of alternative perspectives to that of Birley, although the two did have clear overlapping research interests when it came to Roman military archaeology.

So Birley had an overt Roman military emphasis, a bias towards everything to do with the study of Hadrian's Wall, a narrow conservative focus, and was unconcerned with theory. Was his work also 'stagnant in methodology'? He oversaw the field school at Corbridge for many decades, even if he stepped back as director. Excavation was the mainstay of archaeological research. Some of his graduate students took a field and landscape survey approach (e.g. Brenda Swinbank / Heywood's work on the vallum: Swinbank 1955; Heywood and Breeze 2008; Heywood and Breeze 2010). His prosopographical approach to the study of the Roman army has ultimately led to what is now an international approach to the study of the soldiers (named and unnamed) within the military. Further areas of research and expertise included inscriptions and pottery. He instilled in his students a thirst for evidence (Dobson 1998). This focus on evidence was something inherited from Haverfield (Freeman 2007) and the legacy of his 'Oxford school'. If Birley had not purchased Chesterholm and started work at Vindolanda, would we have anything like the knowledge of the daily lives of Roman soldiers that we do today, thanks to the ongoing work of the Vindolanda Trust? Through the lens of the developments in archaeology in the late 20th century and the early 21st century, Birley's focus may seem narrow. But that does not mean that it did not have pioneering elements of its time and has formed the backbone of wider knowledge about aspects of the Roman army, necessary for the interpretation and presentation of military remains across the Roman Empire.

But did this seeming narrow focus on Hadrian's Wall and the Roman army with strong continental connections lead to Birley being, in effect, ignored by his prehistoric peers at the big universities of the time? Was he seen as being provincial, northern, local, military-biased? Richmond was the exception, but his and Birley's research interests overlapped significantly. Birley also had a strong focus on students, producing a slew of graduates who have made their mark on the archaeology of Roman frontiers, as noted earlier. Perhaps the most obvious comparable institution was Cambridge, who saw itself training future generations of archaeologists 'not only for British archaeology but for the wider

world' (Fagan 2001, 24). Both Birley and Clark grew up in an era of British imperial power, where many of the elites expected to be appointed to governing roles around the British Empire, although that changed with the end of the empire after World War II. Set against such global ambition, Birley's focus on Hadrian's Wall and the military archaeology of northern Britain does seem parochial. It remains to be seen whether the current international interest in borders and frontiers translates to a serious contemporary interest in their antiquity. Yet, when we consider the contemporary interest in local studies and identity, by putting one of Northern England's most significant monuments in its international context, perhaps Birley was ahead of the curve.

## Legacy

James highlighted Roman scholarship in Britain 'becoming largely 'military-sceptic'' (2002, 26), partly due to the agenda laid out by Birley and followed by his students. But is that placing too much emphasis on one individual and one University? He also highlighted that there was an increasing interest by historians, anthropologists and sociologists in the study of warfare and violence at that time (James 2002, 27-8). But we are back to cultural relativism. It is perhaps no surprise that some of the men in the 20th century with direct experience of war chose to focus their efforts elsewhere, and why the organisation of the army and prosopography were preferable to subjects such as the


Figure 2. Map of the locations of the Congresses, 1949-2024.

martial and destructive impacts of Rome on indigenous Iron Age communities? But some men who saw wartime service continued to excavate Roman military sites such as Graham Webster and Kenneth Steer, both of whom Birley had a great deal of respect and time for (Andrew Birley, pers.comm).

Indeed, one of Birley's early students from the 1930s was Kenneth Steer, whose subsequent career was in survey and excavation in Scotland. Steer also served in World War II and became one of the 'Monuments Men' at the end of the war, overseeing repairs to historic buildings. Steer applied his military training to the archaeology of the hillfort and camps at Burnswark in Dumfriesshire, arguing that the site previously thought to be that of a Roman siege was actually a training ground for Roman soldiers (1964). This is an interpretation that became widely accepted until recently, with whether it was a genuine siege or practice now strongly contested (e.g. Breeze 2011; Reid and Nicholson 2019). Regardless of the actual function of the site, it is noteworthy that Steer opted for the 'practice' interpretation. As with Birley, was this also a way from moving away from the horrors and brutality of war? Was a different approach to Roman military studies developing because of scholars' direct experience of warfare? Would we now be attributing aspects of behaviour to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)? Breeze notes for Birley that 'war service spent studying the German army had demonstrated to him the value of understanding the structure of the Roman army and through that gaining a glimpse into the actions and attitudes of its opponents' (Breeze 2018b, 2).

Birley's focus was on rigorous academic discipline and his students. Dobson's obituary of Birley noted that he was not a political animal, and his focus was on the north (1998, 231). Perhaps this is one reason for his omission in Wheeler's writings, given that Wheeler was the arch archaeo-politician of his generation. The golden triangle is significant here: many of the main institutions that influence archaeology in the UK (particularly in England post-devolution) even now are based in London and the south-east. Proximity to London remains important. Birley didn't play on the national scene, but, internationally, it was a different matter.

How many scholars can say that they established a successful international congress that is still going from strength to strength over 75 years later? The importance of the International Congresses for Roman Frontier Studies (Limes Congresses) to international scholarship now goes way beyond reporting the results of fort and frontier excavations. Even at the first Congress in Newcastle in 1949, Norman McCord noted how astonished he was to see Germans and Italians welcomed so soon after the war (reminiscences in Breeze *et al.* 2024, 20), that international collegiality remained a key feature of congresses. Now attracting some 400 scholars from over 30 countries they now have a far more thematic focus: from small finds to grand strategic analyses; from dress and ornaments to digital presentation. Geographically they have moved around the frontier provinces of the empire, subject to political factors creating difficulties in organising congresses in West Asia and North Africa (Figure 2). Would we have four Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage properties inscribed by UNESCO without the Limes Congresses bringing people together on a triennial basis to discuss shared research themes and ideas? Whilst theory remains an understudied area, other aspects of research have progressed significantly thanks to this international cooperation. The congress is one key legacy of Birley's work (Breeze *et al.* 2024).

Birley's students included quite a few women (see figure 1). Whilst it was difficult for women to forge careers in post-World War Two Britain, especially if they married and had children, several of Birley's female Durham students have had a lasting effect on the study of aspects of the Roman military, including Val Maxfield, Brenda Swinbank/Heywood, and Grace Simpson.

Lastly, one site that has transformed our understanding of the daily lives of soldiers on a Roman frontier has been that at Vindolanda (Chesterholm) on the Stanegate to the rear of Hadrian's Wall. Whilst the major discoveries of the tablets that have made the site so internationally famous were discovered by Eric's son Robin (the excitement of discovery recorded in Birley 1977, 132), it was Eric who showed key interest in the site and was involved in his retirement with the Vindolanda Trust, established in 1970. Birley's 'narrow' focus can be thanked for immeasurably increasing our understanding of the Roman army and Roman frontier's.

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I hope that Simon James will forgive me for writing a reflection on a paper he wrote over 20 years ago! But he has done much to progress the theoretical aspect of Roman military studies and can hopefully see progression. I am indebted to David Breeze for numerous discussions on this topic and for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Ian Ralston for discussions of Stuart Piggott and Martha Stewart and Andrew Birley for discussions on Eric Birley. This work has been part of wider research into 20th Roman frontier scholarship that I have been undertaking with Tatiana Ivleva, Anna Walas and David Breeze. I will thank Simon Gilmour for his patience in my research. I must also thank John Reid for his

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# Visualising Roman Military Bases in Cities: The Challenge of Rome's Castra Nova

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At first glance, the epitaph of Flavius Mocianus (*AE* 1954, 80) of the *equites singulares*, might seem a triumphant testimony to harmony, inclusion and the triumph of *romanitas*. The trooper, whose Thracian name recalls the Balkan ancestry of many of the imperial horse guard, is memorialized by his wife, Aelia Festiva, a woman whose own name might suggest an Italian origin (Busch and Greene 2024: 140). The three registers of the tombstone present standard funerary motifs, at the top a figure reclining on a (funerary) banquet couch, in the centre the deceased standing in a relaxed pose with his horse, a sword on his hip almost the only visual reminder of his military calling. And in the bottom register a *calo*, or groom, once again with the horse, a set piece scene that shows both the prosperity of a slave-holding soldier, and his equestrian vocation. Essential set pieces all, but there are two delightful and unusual additions, suspended on the right of the trooper are two diminutive figures, one brandishing a bow. They look like children, one aping perhaps the military calling Mocianus embodied. Who are they? The inscription below suggests an answer, for it refers not only to Aelia Festiva, but also to their sons. It also tells us that Mocianus was stationed in Castra Priora/ Castra Prima, the first of two military bases built for the *equites singulares* in and around the Eastern Caelian in Rome. Taken in isolation, the memorial offers an image of integration, soldier and civilian, Thracian and Italian (?) building a home together at the heart of empire. But how representative is this picture of military life in Rome?

Rome's dominion rested on cities and soldiers, and the intersection of the two repeatedly attracted the interest of many ancient writers. Favourite themes were the unsuitability of urban-born recruits for military service (Tacitus *Ann.* 1.31), the corrupting influence of the city on military discipline – a charge frequently levelled at Roman armies in the urbanised East (Wheeler 1996), and, somewhat in contradiction to the latter, the degree to which forts, fortresses and even campaign headquarters themselves resembled cities (Livy 44.39.5. Josephus *Bell. Iud.* 3.87; Tacitus *Hist.* 2.80). There were clearly many conflicting perspectives on cities and soldiers. Soldiers might protect the empire of cities, but they were also seen as potentially dangerous within them. Certainly, this theme is pronounced in Rome itself, where the guards are repeatedly alluded to as a destabilising presence. A low point in the Praetorian Guard's involvement in the politics of Rome came in 238, for example, when the populace attacked the Castra Praetoria, while the guardsmen set fire to some parts of the City and pillaged others (Herodian 7.11.6-7.12.7). Yet, in contrast to the wealth of literary references to soldiers in cities, there are notably few archaeological studies of military stations in urban areas. Simon James' (2019) monograph on the military base at Dura-Europos, a Syrian city occupied by Rome from *c.* 165 to *c.* 256 CE, is a work of exceptional significance, both for our understanding of the site specifically, and for its distinctive approach to the evidence.

This paper presents another important and well-preserved example of a military station in a city, the Castra Nova of Rome. Founded *c.* 193-196 CE, the Castra Nova lay a few hundred metres from Mocianus' barracks in the Castra Priora/Castra Prima; it provided the horse guards with a second, twin fort within the City. The Castra Nova would have been in use at the time Mocianus and Aelia Festiva raised their family. Unlike the Castra Priora, however, large parts of the Castra Nova remain accessible to modern researchers, and this paper draws on that evidence and on visualisation 'provocations' based upon it to think about the position of a military community within the city.

Before examining the Castra though, it is useful to reflect on James' own opening remarks in his study of the military base at Dura-Europos, in which he critiques the problematic tendency in the historiography of the Roman world to treat the army as a thing apart wider society (James 2019: 32, see also James 2002). Busch has made a similar observation in Rome, noting that the military presence there has attracted less scholarly interest than it might have done, partly because the daily life of soldiers has often been seen more as the purview of archaeologists of the Roman provinces, rather than of Classical Archaeologists (Busch 2011: 13). A risk is that polarised models of soldiers in cities emerge. Without wishing for a moment to diminish the terror and suffering that armed men could enact on a population, it is important to get beyond simple binaries of soldier/civilian interaction, as Stoll has emphasised in his study of Rome's armies in the Near East (Stoll 2001). Exciting ongoing work applying web of violence (Hamby and Grych 2013) approaches

to bioarchaeology (Redfern pers. com.), and a wider public discourse on intersectionality, should all serve to remind us that the feelings and experience of individuals encountering soldiers on the streets could vary dramatically depending on their identity. It might even help us remember that the military communities were themselves far from homogenous.

The diversity of the military population, even within Rome, becomes apparent when we look at the Caelian Hill and its environs, an area two km south of the quarters of the Praetorian Guard, the Castra Praetoria. The Castra Peregrina, an establishment designed in part to accommodate soldiers visiting the heart of empire, was housed on the Caelian, while nearby lay the base of the fifth cohort of Vigiles, a paramilitary police force. Recent excavations at the site of the Via Amba Aradam (Rea and Saviane 2020), have recovered evidence for what may prove to be another barrack complex at the foot of the Lateran Hill. On the eastern Caelian, the peri-urban landscape largely occupied by *horti* of the Rome's aristocracy ended up accommodating a growing military population. Mocianus' base, the Castra Prima/Priora was established in the Trajanic period, and is associated with the remains of the 'Great Hall' discovered on the Via Tasso in the 1880s (Lanciani 1897, 338). The remarkable collection of altars found within this building shows that the *equites singulares* worshipped a cosmopolitan array of deities, reflecting the diverse origins of troopers recruited to this elite unit (Speidel 1994b: 139-145). The Thracian Hero is for example repeatedly honoured on their altars, in a form that echoed in the portrayal of the deceased of many of the horse guards' *Reitergrabsteine* funerary monuments. The second fort built for the horse guard, the Castra Nova, was built under Septimius Severus, and survives in part beneath the Archbasilica of St John Lateran. The rationale for locating these cavalry contingents within this part of Rome, a mere five-minute trot from the Senate House, the Palatine, and the Sessorian, will be discussed in further detail below. What is clear from the archaeology, however, is that housing these mounted troops involved the demolition of substantial buildings and ultimately a reshaping of the city's skyline.

Over the last fifteen or so years it has been my privilege to co-direct work in the eastern Caelian with Professor Paolo Liverani. Our work in the pioneering Lateran Project focussed initially on the area of the Castra Nova and the buildings that preceded and succeeded it (Haynes and Liverani 2020, with references), in the latter case, the Constantinian, Lateran Basilica. This work has since expanded, through collaboration with an outstanding team of specialists, to reach across

Figure 1. At work in the Basement of the Castra Nova

the eastern Caelian as part of the 'Rome Transformed' Project (Haynes, Liverani, Ravasi, and Kay 2023), a collaboration between Newcastle University, the University of Florence, the British School at Rome and the Italian National Research Council (CNR). The results emerging from this work also illuminate some of the dynamics that Simon James sought to explore at Dura-Europos. Before discussing the results, however, it may be useful to reflect on the similarities and differences in researchers' approaches to the two areas.

Perhaps the most significant similarity between the nature of work undertaken by my colleagues and I with that of James at Dura-Europos is the fact that it is overwhelmingly non-intrusive. In addition to the geophysical survey work undertaken, it draws heavily on the study of excavated features and archival data. While all who aspire to undertake excavation should master the skills of reappraising older excavations prior to launching new ones, relatively little is made in studies of archaeological methodology about how this is to be best achieved. Yet, as James' work at Dura demonstrates, some of the most remarkable insights can emerge from such reappraisals. Indeed, rather than treating the re-examination of historic work as a mere prelude to excavation, it should be understood – especially when delivered at scale – as a major research project.

Another similarity is the fact that the emphasis within the analysis presented here is very much on built space. As James (2019, 47) has observed, there has been a growing body of research that has sought to examine the dynamic interactions that took place between soldiers and non-combatants through the study of small-finds distribution. Much of this work is excellent, but all of it has to confront some hard realities, our understanding of discard strategies and site formation processes at many sites is in its infancy but must always recall that we read finds distributions not only through a distorted lens, but a lens that sees only a small part of the space in which interactions occurred. And historic excavations seldom record the location of small finds with sufficient resolution or rigour.

The real strength of the site for study lies in what survives of its buildings. The substantial remains of the Castra Nova and its associated structures have been exposed in very diverse circumstances over an extended period, and while some have been reburied, large areas of the complex remain physically accessible beneath today's Archbasilica of St John Lateran and its associated utilities spaces and tunnels. Admittedly what constitutes physically accessible varies dramatically from place to place within this zone, collectively referred to by team members as the *scavi*. Some areas have been set out in such a manner as to facilitate visits and indeed these areas are open to specially arranged tours. Accessing others is a wholly different matter, with team members sometimes obliged to crawl on their stomachs, scramble over rubble filled passageways, and/or squeeze into relatively airless spaces to work in a sitting or crouched position (Figure 1). In his work on Dura-Europos, Simon James (2019, 46-47) rightly emphasises the importance of the experience of moving across and around a site. This had for him particular implications in terms of appreciating the overall topography, and environment. By contrast, work within the Castra Nova at one level deprived team members of this sort of experience. Navigating complex, truncated, sections of the *scavi*, some of which were interrupted by large chunks of modern infrastructure, and routinely operating in areas without natural light or the ready flow of air could be disorienting. Yet, there were many compensations, for while no buildings survived to their original height, extended stretches of elevation could be found in many places. It was therefore possible to get a sense of entering rooms, through doorways, sometimes over surviving threshold stones, and to locate where windows and light wells would have been placed. In some areas too, as discussed below, enough traces of wall and floor decoration survived to allow for the interior decorative schemes to be visualised – a rarity in the archaeology of Roman military installations.

Above all, what emerged from the experience of working in and around the Castra Nova was the sense of the potential for, and necessity to pursue, the recording of space in three dimensions. Not only did the vaults, ceilings, and walls of the Castra need such detailed attention, but the entire urban setting of the complex demanded it, and as James has demonstrated visualisation requires an acute sensitivity to all dimensions. A founding principle of our work was therefore to build our structural analysis and geophysical surveys (Piro *et al.* 2020) on digital models derived from a comprehensive Terrestrial Laser Scan (TLS) survey of the entire complex.

One challenge common to both James' work and our own, is that where substantial structural evidence has been exposed by earlier excavators, it is not enough simply to resurvey it, vital though that is. Rather a different kind of seeing is required, it is necessary to understand as far as possible what was removed to expose that evidence, and how the surviving evidence itself has undergone change since it was first exposed. Thus, the surveys must be undertaken with close reference to any surviving documentation produced by the original excavators. Clearly, such documentation requires careful reading, and often when undertaking such a review, the attentive reader will observe biases, omissions or recurrent errors in the work of their predecessors. But the other point to consider, when

setting archive notes, plans and photos alongside our own higher-resolution images and surveys, is that exposed archaeology has an afterlife too, and a range of factors from erosion to modern consolidation have to be taken into consideration.

In introducing his work on the Dura-Europos base, James notes of his approach that 'It also seeks to innovate—or at least, to assert the value of neglected approaches—in emphasizing so strongly the role of the visual at all stages of scholarship, from data collection to presentation, in an academic field still, in my view, unduly myopic in its fixation on text' (James 2019: vii) and states further 'I came to understand that drawing can be a part of the research process as fundamental as writing text (James 2019: 46)'. This is a compelling observation that he has made repeatedly during his career (James 1997, 2015). For those of us working on the Castra Nova and its environs too, the generation of visualisations as part of the research process became a vital part of the whole journey from data capture, through interpretation to presentation and beyond. Yet while James' extraordinary versatility allowed him to achieve this himself, I found that I needed to depend more on a collaborative approach to fully exploit 'the role of the visual'.

Whether working as a 'lone researcher' as James has done (James 2019: vii, 42), or working in a team, visual thinking is essential. James' skills as an archaeological illustrator, as evident in his plans and elevations as in his magnificent drawings of finds and visualisations of dress, are exceptional. Most individuals, indeed, most teams, are not so blessed, but that weakness can be turned to advantage. Disentangling our evidence in Rome required visual thinking, but if we were to perceive our research area as lived space, we needed to go beyond the 2D plans we were all used to producing and using to something more. The form of that 'something more' made explicit disagreements and nuances that could be hidden with a text, but had to be confronted in an illustration. A happy evolution was to forge collaboration with a skilled architectural visualiser, Iwan Peverett, whose professed ignorance of antiquity provided a perfect foil for those of us who felt we knew it better. Assumptions, on both sides, were repeatedly challenged, as Iwan furnished team members with 3D models of varying complexity, including generating photo realistic computer visualisations of buildings as they might once have appeared. Such visualisations also carry, as the authors of the London (Beacham, Denard and Niccolucci 2006) and Seville Charters (Lopez-Menchero and Grande 2018) have long since noted, a risk. The more compelling and sophisticated the image, the more the risk that it can mislead. Far too many visualisations, some outstanding works of scholarship, others mere fantasy, lack reference to the evidence base that (should) underpin them. In our work in Rome, we have adopted the term 'provocation' for our visualisations (Haynes, Ravasi, Peverett, Grellert and Simpson 2023), a term that makes explicit that the images are part of an (ongoing) argument about the data – and one that allows us, crucially, to communicate and debate our evolving thoughts within and beyond the team, across specialisations and language boundaries. The remainder of this paper will explain how we applied the provocation concept to the military presence in south-east Rome, and most particularly to the Castra Nova and its environs. Further information on the data underpinning the provocations shown here can be found at https://rometrans.ncl.ac.uk/rtsciedoc/.

## The archaeology of the Castra Nova

Colini's study of the Caelian (1944), partially updated by Pavolini (2006) and Consalvi (2009), remains a vital source of information about the wider setting of the Castra Nova, while Liverani's (1998a, 1999, 2004) studies of the immediate, Lateran quarter, within which the fort was located provides essential context (Figure 2). All those working on the area have had to confront the fact that there is, however, very little documentation surviving from the successive excavations of the Castra itself. It is clear that there will have been many interventions within the site over the centuries, some of which, visible within the scavi, will have been linked to the Cathedral's needs for new burial spaces and chambers, others to the requirements of engineers working on major rebuilding projects. The first explicit record of discoveries which can be linked to the site comes in 1732 with the diggings below what was to become the Corsini Chapel, works which yielded the famous Corsini throne, but also two inscriptions associated with the *equites singulares*. Subsequent works with more explicit archaeological agenda were undertaken in the nineteenth century but only the briefest records survive of most of the twentieth century investigations of the fort itself. The best documented were those undertaken by Enrico Josi 1934-1938, but even here, we have only one brief paper by the director himself (Josi 1934), augmented by his surviving photo archive, and a helpful summary by Colini (1944: 353-359).

Rather than offer a comprehensive summary of all these excavations, something readily available elsewhere (Liverani 1998a), this section will focus on the evidence for key elements of the military base, namely the principia, the barracks, the drains, the walls and the baths. Each of these elements, when visualised from the surviving evidence, has something very important to reveal about a form of military life within a city, but also something significant to say about the limitations and

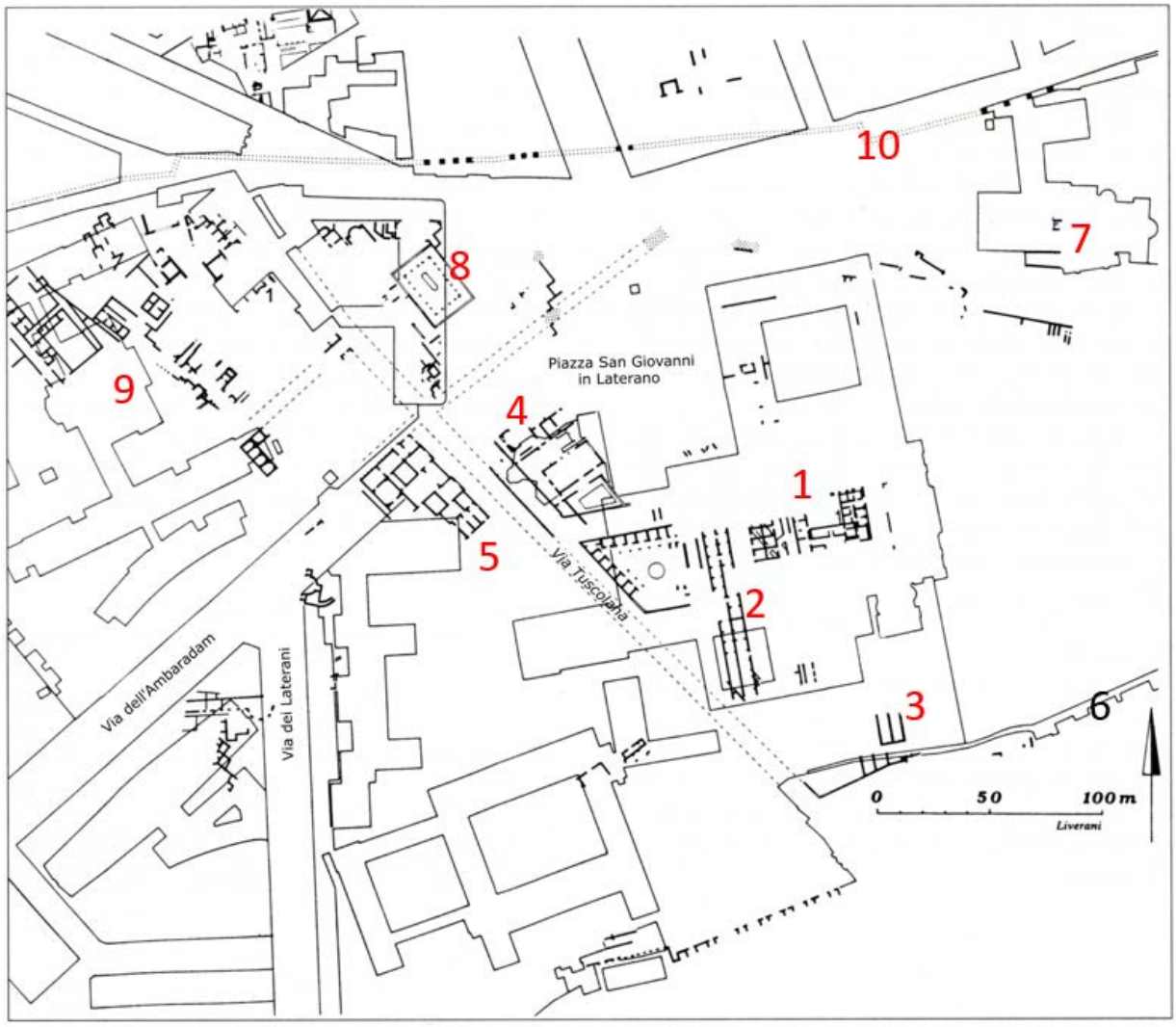


Figure 2. Plan, adapted from Liverani (1998a) showing the Lateran Area. 1-3 elements of the Castra, including 1. Principia, Barrack range and road. 2. Section of Barrack Range. 3. Section of Barrack Range observed in rescue excavations in 1965. 4. Baths believed to belong to the Castra. 5. Another Bath complex, most likely for public use. 6. The line of the Aurelian Wall. 7. Elements of elite residential properties preserved beneath the Scala Santa. 8-9. Elements of elite residential properties preserved beneath the Hospital of S. Giovanni. Property 9. Has been identified as the Horti of Domitia Lucilla, mother of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. 10. Course of the Claudio-Neronian aqueduct.

opportunities of different archaeological approaches to the data.

Perhaps no structure better exemplifies this than the courtyard structure (built *c.*193-196 CE) discovered beneath the nave of the Lateran Basilica by Josi in 1934. This structure, unearthed only a couple of years after David Clark's excavation of a similar complex at Dura-Europos (built 211-212 CE), was – as was its Durene counterpart – termed a *Praetorium* in published reports. At the time of the respective excavations, both teams understood their examples to be headquarters, but adhered to the then current practice of calling such structures *praetoria* (Colini 1944: 356 for Lateran, Rostovtzeff 1934: 205; Gilliam in Rostovtzeff *et al.* 1952: 69 n.1 for Dura-Europos). They should, of course, be identified as *principia* (Busch 2011: 81 for Lateran; Rostovtzeff 1934: 201-218; James 2019: 78 for Dura-Europos). At the heart of this interpretation is not just the familiar plan, identifiable in such complexes across the empire, but also the associated epigraphic evidence. The essential elements of the former may be swiftly described, a series of small interconnecting chambers running along the sides of a courtyard. A colonnaded entryway allows access to the courtyard from the south, lending a monumental aspect to the entry that contrasts with the long rectangular buildings that dominate what survives of the rest of the fort interior. Excavations to the north of the complex stopped on the edge of the courtyard, but strongly suggest the presence of a large hall, quite likely of basilica form. One battered section of masonry on the northern edge

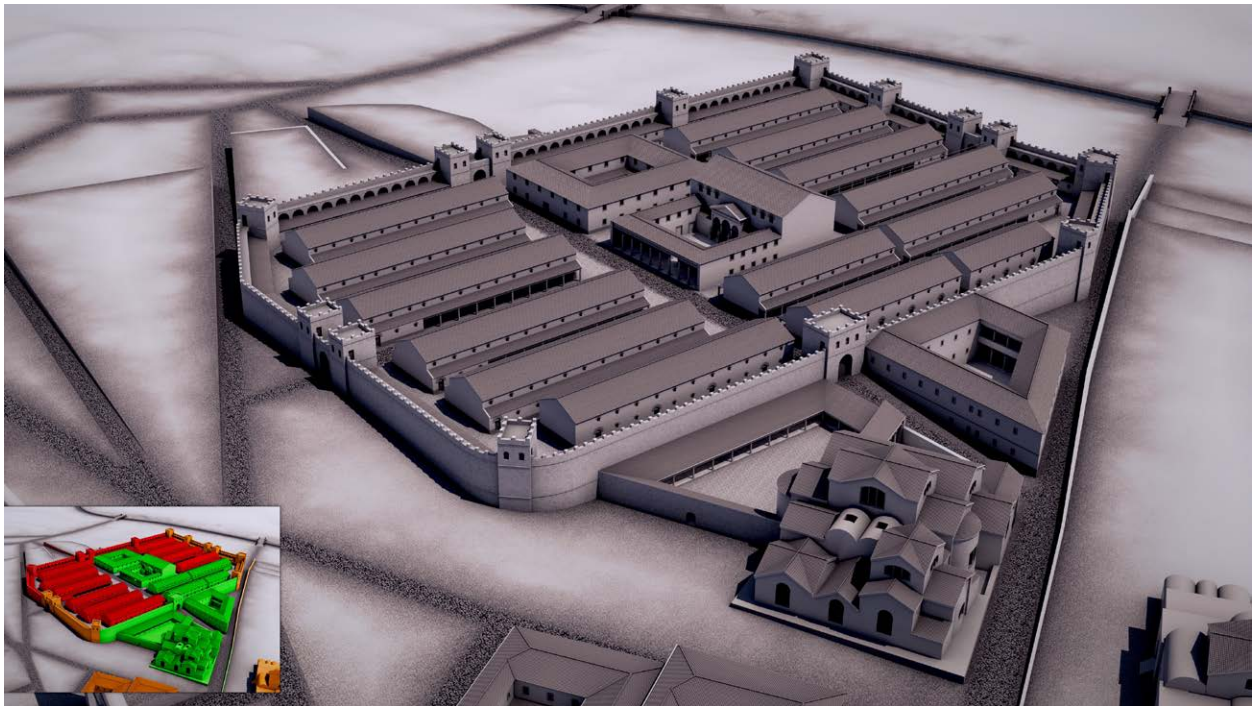

Figure 3. Visualisation/Provocation of the Castra Nova *c.* AD 275 looking southeast. Inset: Green indicates deductions from surviving elevations, amber deductions from antiquarian records otherwise uncorroborated, red hypothetical elements (Rome Transformed).

of excavation would be consistent with a stepped entrance into such a hall and appears to have been clad in green marble. The foundations of this southern wall of whatever stood here were certainly substantial, and were exposed by excavators to a depth of 5.8 m below the building's ground surface, as such they would clearly have been capable of supporting a major edifice. Our visual hypothesis will also look strikingly familiar to anyone who has ever looked at a model or picture of headquarters building in a Roman fort or fortress in Rome's western provinces (Figure 3). Yet, it must be remembered that this model is designed as a provocation. Analogies are at once the staple of archaeological interpretation and its Achilles Heel. The comforting familiarity of this model with others already widely disseminated, and perhaps rather unconsciously absorbed, should not blind us to the fact that some variations from our imagined norms are possible, and indeed the same evidence – foundations, wall widths, dimensions of rooms - would allow for two storey buildings around the courtyard, rather than the single storey arrangement often shown in visualisations of *principia*'.

At this point, the underpinning of the Lateran Basilica lies at about 1.45 m above the floor surface of the building in question. While that is not, in this case, sufficient to determine whether there were upper stories, it does at least allow for some more detailed visualisations of the courtyard building's ground floor (Figure 4). In particular, the decorative scheme of the tessellated floor survives in one of the chambers off the courtyard, while in most of the exposed rooms, the lower register of the decorated wall plaster survives. The combined decorative scheme compares well with contemporary examples in non-military contexts, a point that invites reflection on the mixture of aesthetics – some uniquely military such as crenellated towers, others more readily familiar in public buildings and well-appointed private homes, that could have been found in Roman military bases.

That the courtyard building was most likely a *principia* is however strongly suggested by other evidence. In addition to the substantial fragments from two altars, Josi recovered an intact inverted ionic capital standing *in situ* on a column within one of the chambers off the courtyard. There are two inscriptions on the capital recording a *collegium* and *schola* of *curatores*, junior cavalry officers, most likely of the *equites singulares* (*AE* 1935, 156 = 1954, 83 and *AE* 1935, 157 = 1954, 83). Both inscriptions are from early in Severus' reign; the first demonstrates that a *schola*, or guild room of *curatores* was consecrated at the site 1 January 197. The most obvious parallel would be with the *collegium* inscriptions from the Severan legionary *principia* at Lambaesis, in modern Algeria. That a similar arrangement existed in the *principia* at Dura-Europos, has also been suggested, though there because of the communal bench seating in two of the rooms (Rostovtzeff 1934: 208, James 2019: 85) something not recorded within the Lateran example.

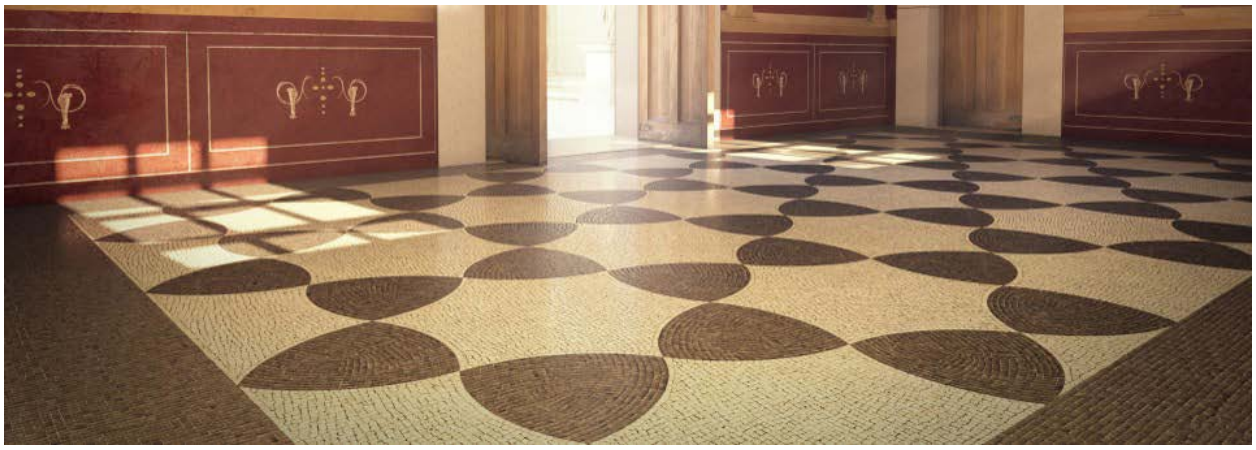

Figure 4. Visualisation/Provocation of a ground floor room in the courtyard building /principia of the Castra Nova *c.* AD 310. All decorative elements are directly attested within the room (Peverett and Haynes).

The operation of this building as, at the very least, a central place for officers within the fort, raises its own question of the way in which this structure related to the wider urban fabric. At Dura-Europos, the *principia* stands out as the most conspicuously recognisable military purpose-built structure within the walls of the city. This structure would certainly have been both conspicuous and also built to a design unconstrained by the earlier history of building on the spot. Here substantial lavish housing, perhaps already imperial property, certainly domus architecture of the most refined form, had been levelled off and stripped of its decorative elements before being buried beneath a terrace purpose designed for the military. The result was a reshaping of part of the Caelian Hill, creating a new skyline, at least at its southwestern edge (Figure 5). This terrace effect was later to be used by the builders of Constantine's Basilica, and it is tempting to wonder how far the very existence of the Severan fort terrace contributed to the visualisation of the space as suitable for such an imposing foundation. Fascinatingly, and probably not coincidentally, the *principia* of the Castra Nova was buried right under the centre of the Constantinian Basilica. Intentionally or not, the change of cityscape in the aftermath of Constantine's victory at the Battle of Milvian Bridge, showed not simply a change in regime, but a new language of power, establishing the world's first cathedral, the cathedral of the Bishop of Rome, on a site formerly a stronghold of the imperial guard.

Other buildings too occupied this platform. Substantial sections of two long ranges, each two rooms wide, and consisting of a series of chambers each of approximately 4.75 x 4.8 m, survive beneath the Lateran Basilica. The southern end of another range of similar proportions was exposed during the installation of fuel tanks at the Lateran garage in 1965 (Liverani 1998: 10). The most likely explanation of these buildings is that they are barracks, and indeed the back-to-back configuration of rooms recalls *contubernia* rooms, and evidence for verandas on the long sides of some ranges all recall structures identified as barracks at sites across the empire. Of course, it is always useful to recall, that in most cases the identification of such structures as barracks is based on a series of assumptions, and analogies, rather than explicit proof – and they could have served multiple purposes. Sadly, no graffiti survives from the walls of the Lateran 'contubernia' chambers, which have lost most of their wall plaster., to further illuminate their purpose. Striking here though is that the overall appearance of these purpose-built structures, erected on one of the highest points in southeast Rome, would have been utterly familiar to military personnel from the provinces. The military architecture of Rome's frontiers is prominently reproduced.

At one level, therefore, the situation is very different from that at Dura-Europos, where pre-existing buildings were adapted to provide accommodation for soldiers in the late 2nd early 3rd century CE (Baird 2014: 18-19, James 2019: 139-142). Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to imagine, either in Rome or elsewhere, that the way familiar elements of military architecture were introduced into the landscape indicated a lack of imagination on the part of planners, builders, and commanders. Not only was a wholly new suite of buildings required for the repurposing of this space - the lavish housing the Castra replaced would have been wholly unsuited to accommodating large numbers of men and horses - but the way in which it was inserted into the built landscape required creative engineering solutions.

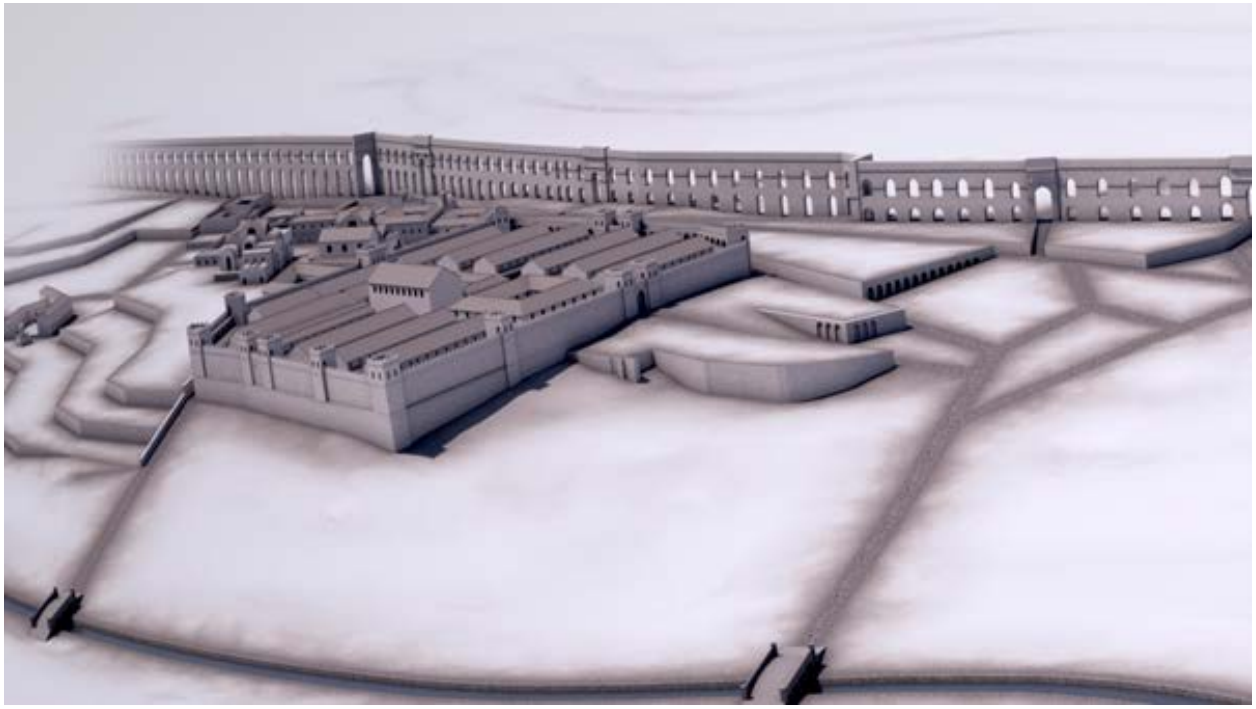

Figure 5. The Castra Nova in the early third century as seen from the south (Rome Transformed).

Deep historic excavations at the Lateran site allowed the team to study these solutions in detail (Haynes and Liverani 2020: 96-98). On the higher slopes, pre-existing walls, all parts of the luxurious houses that occupied the site prior to the building of the fort, were stripped of decorative marble and then cut down to a prescribed height. Conversely, at the south-western edge of the Castra complex, to achieve the same height, basements were constructed beneath the 'barrack' rooms. Unparalleled to this writer's knowledge anywhere else, these basements, accessible by stairs and illuminated by light wells, made imaginative use of the opportunities the creation of a level platform provided. The opportunity to build upwards also greatly facilitated the installation of a substantial network of sewers, an essential resource for a military base within a densely packed city.

One major challenge for visualisation is determining the precise location and form of the Castra's walls which were assuredly substantially demolished as part of the Constantinian Basilica building programme. That the Castra had walls is strongly suggested on the basis not only of analogy with other sites, a depiction on the tombstone of a trooper of the *equites singulares* (Speidel 1994: 326-327, n.595), and the relationship of the site to the later Aurelian Wall circuit, but also of the well-documented need of military commanders to control their commands. Simon James' writing on this topic, and in particular on the use of forts as 'wolf cages' has underscored the fundamental importance of wall circuits to the empire's armies for this purpose (James 2011: 173-174). In the case of the Lateran/Caelian Hill the location of a fort wall would also be wholly consistent with a Severan transformation of city fabric – one that confronted travellers to the city from the south with a very explicitly military face. Busch has noted two contemporary transformations that would have had a similar impact, those in the NE of Rome and those a mere 22 km SSE of the Castra Nova, at Albano (2013: 110). Under Severus well-attested, and extensive work on the circuit of the ancient Castra Praetoria would have similarly presented visitors from the west with an approach dominated by fortified walls. While at Albano, the new (Severan) Castra Albana of *Legio II Parthica* likewise transformed the landscape, presenting a bristling fortification where formerly an imperial palace had stood.

The visualisation/provocation (Figure 3) presented here gives a sense of just how imposing the new fort would have been, and as work continues within the Rome Transformed project on the roads and houses around the Castra Nova, the significance of its location becomes clearer. At one level, the location makes tactical sense. Guidelines Roman commanders were encouraged to consider when moving in hostile territory apply (*De Munitionibus Castrorum* 56-57). The high ground is dominated, the site overlooks water ways (to the south) as are major communications routes coming from the south on both sides of the fort. At another, it makes sense as an anchor in the second part of Severus' own vision for Rome. Military control, marked not only by the construction of new installations, and the

concurrent dramatic increase in the number of Rome's armed and belted men (Herodian 3.13.4; Coulston 2000: 81), served as an anchor for part of a still wider vision. Like other celebrated Roman rulers before him, Severus retained a brutally realistic view of the necessity of military power while seeking to project a more urbane face to his rule. Severus' coin issues proclaimed him *Restitutor Urbis*, and he went on – after securing the military/security situation in the city – to a substantial building programme key elements of which (notably the new palace at the Sessorian) took place in the south-east of Rome (Lusnia 2014). It is surely significant that most of the major works in the city constructed in Severus' reign were built after the 1st January 197, by which time, as we have seen above, the Castra Nova is known to have been operational.

As James notes in his study of Dura-Europos, study of even small sections of the hydraulic network in a settlement can illuminate important relationships between structures and spaces that cannot otherwise be observed in the surviving evidence (2019: 48). Lying largely beneath what is today the Lateran Baptistery, immediately northwest of barrack-like buildings of the Castra Nova, are the remains of a substantial bath complex. Pelliccioni (1973) the excavator of this complex argued that that bath suite was established prior to the construction of the Castra Nova, and merely restored during the Severan period, but a comprehensive reappraisal of the site by Thea Ravasi and Elettra Santucci for the Lateran Project/Rome Transformed shows that what actually happened here was different. There was a building on the site before, but it was not a major bath complex, rather the baths were built later. Furthermore, the presence in their walls of stamped brick from the sole reign of Caracalla (211-217) may actually date from the primary phase of bath building. As the provocation shows, the baths lay immediately adjacent to the fort's gates, and almost certainly served those stationed within its walls. If this relatively later date is correctly understood, what are the implications for the soldiers? One is that if their hygiene practices were broadly consistent with the rest of Rome's regimental communities, they must have found somewhere else to bathe prior to completion of their own baths under Caracalla, and surviving evidence from the area indicates that there were indeed other large baths in the immediate vicinity, with one just across the road. There is no absolute need to imagine a rigid segregation in the configuration of baths, we know soldiers used baths primarily designed for civil communities, and that military baths could be used by non-soldiers, but nonetheless certain bath suites demonstrably did operate primarily for specified groups and in this emerging bathing topography, we might see further evidence of a differentiation of soldiers from others within the cityscape.

For a cavalry fort water pipes, drains and sewers had further significance, not only were they obviously vitally important for the soldiers, they were also essential for their mounts. There is, interestingly, no evidence for any major development of the aqueduct network at the time of the fort's construction, the Claudio-Neronian aqueduct was not substantially developed until 201 (Claridge 2010: 344), several years after the fort became operational. Nevertheless, having horses in numbers in an urban centre will have had multiple implications from the outset. Rands' modelling of the needs and outputs of the estimated 638 horses (including remounts) required by a quingenary ala give a sense of the scale (Rands 2022). She estimates that depending on location and workload the horses would need between 12760 and 38280 litres of clean fresh water per day, and that they would produce over seven thousand litres of urine and over 14,670 kg of manure during the same period. While the Castra's impressive hydraulic network would have supported the movement of the liquids, mucking out would have required a steady flow of wagons to and from the fort. While horses and rider must have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by some of the green spaces on the edge of the city, there are questions as to how they accessed them, and to what degree that access disrupted ownership and management of the *horti,* the luxurious gardens of the elite, that occupied much of the area.

What did all this mean for the wider question of soldiers in the city? At one level it is easy to see here how members of the Senatorial class might indeed feel the sense of threat famously articulated by Cassius Dio (75.2.6) who refers to the savage sight and sound of the throng of soldiers now within the City. While the fort's location allowed it to provide security for the growing Sessorian Palace, and supporting details to the Palatine, it was equally well placed to send riders to the Senate House within minutes. For some, Rome may indeed have felt more like a city under occupation. Students of forts in the Roman provinces are accustomed to seeing extra-mural settlement attached to those bases, and (perhaps, sometimes naively) to assuming that such settlements were primarily there for soldier's families. Our extensive work across the area has yet to identify any equivalent, there is no obvious candidate for an associated quarter. This does not mean that it did not exist, but rather that if it did, it lay significantly beyond the fort walls.

In fact, the New Fort lay amongst some the finest houses on the desirable eastern fringes of the city. Work by the SGL2 and Rome Transformed projects on these houses reveals how properties established well before the foundation of the Castra continued to thrive as opulent dwellings, well after the base was established, and indeed well after it was demolished. Of course, the

occupants could have had radically different feelings about the change. For some, members of the imperial family, the sense of added security might have been a bonus, others perhaps less (temporarily) blessed might have felt altogether less comfortable. Though within the wealthier homes of the quarter, porticoed courtyards, fountains and gardens would have provided a sense of seclusion from a brooding, and noisy military presence beyond their walls, the reality was that large numbers of armed and belted men were mere metres away.

More generally, of course, a plethora of possible reactions and relationships between soldiers and others was possible. Soldiers will have ranged widely across the cityscape and beyond, on imperial duties and off duty. The provocation presented in Figure 3 represents a plausible, if rather tightly-packed, model that draws on evidence from surviving buildings, streets, terracing and places its boundaries where surviving archaeology appears to indicate quite different patterns of activity. Even the most generous hypothetical allocation of barrack space within this model indicates that it is unlikely that the fort ever housed a milliary formation, a point already observed by Busch (2011: 80) even though a number of specialists have conjectured that at this time both units of the guard were a notional one thousand riders each (Coulston 2000: 80; Speidel 1994b: 59, but see also Busch 2011: 72, 80) . Nevertheless, debates about the size of the horse guard notwithstanding, the likelihood is that significant numbers of horse guards would be beyond the walls at any given time, even when not required to accompany the emperor on campaign. Providing security for the emperor will have demanded the deployment of picquets at a range of imperial properties. And indeed, it is possible that the cemetery of the *equites singulares* at ad Duas Lauros, almost an hour's walk from the Castra Nova, might reflect the deployment of a substantial contingent of them on the imperial estate there. It is worth incidentally noting that despite the extra-ordinarily large number of epitaphs commemorating members of the *equites singulares* from the cemetery, there are none commemorating Praetorian guardsmen, a point that affirms the degree to which these guards units were kept apart –the one counterbalancing the other.

This same rich body of epigraphy suggests something else, something rather surprising, about patterns of soldier civilian interaction with regards to the *equites singulares*. It also brings us back to the family of Mocianus. Relative to unit size, more funerary monuments survive for the *equites singulares* than any other unit of the Roman army, yet only a tiny fraction of the 428 surviving epitaphs record family members. This startling result has been thoroughly studied by Busch and Greene, who note that only 17 women are recorded in any way on these monuments, and that two of these are daughters (Busch and Greene 2024: 128, Table 5.3). The contrast with evidence for other units in Rome such as the Praetorian, is stark and consistent with the testimony of diplomas issued to horse guards – not a single example refers to family members (Busch and Greene 2024).

## Conclusion

Where does this leave our analysis? At one level of course, the diverse sources and spaces under consideration allow for multiple explanatory models. Many of these will remain at the mercy of scholars' preconceptions of soldiers, cities, and the wider Roman world. Nevertheless, there are certain observations that should emerge. First, James' call for more visual thinking must be heeded. Visualisations/Provocations do not just help us to better understand built space, but also to appreciate how it might be experienced. In Rome that approach confronts us with a view of the military presence that is imposing and potentially downright alarming – the use of space is at times determinedly intimidating. Second, our evidence can pull us in different directions, and that is natural too, because soldiers and civilians are not just two monolithic groups, but rather groups of individuals who we must always remember can and do exhibit an array of behaviours. Throw into that any one of the other changes to a city in the course of a day, a year or a lifetime and simple explanatory models quickly wilt under the pressure. Finally, third, military communities could have lived, engaged, and operated differently in different spaces within the same city. Many Praetorians seemed to have had families. Yet, despite the happy image presented on Mocianus' stela, many of the *equites singulares* in Rome may indeed have continued to seem a group apart, more closely aligned to the will of the emperor than to the interests of their urban neighbours, and it would seem often without the mitigation of having families nearby.

## Acknowledgements

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# Part 2

# De-Colonial Approaches to Relations on Rome's Frontiers

# Speak Softly and Carry a Big Cross: Diplomacy, Evangelism and Ignorance on Justinian's African Frontier

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The relationship between Justinian's grand military strategy and his ambitions as a Christian emperor have been much debated in recent scholarship. The sheer breadth of activity over his long reign (527-565 CE) seems to demand analysis on a global level, and stark turning points – the Nika riots, the early victories in the west, the devastating onset of plague – seem like chapter breaks in a grand, unfolding narrative (Heather 2018; Luttwak 2009: 77-94; Meier 2003; Rubin 1995). Justinian's imperial ideology was intricately entangled with his own Christian identity, and this must add a further nuance to any study of his strategy (Engelhardt 1974; Greatrex 2005: 490-6; Greatrex 2014; Whitby 2021: 29-33). At its simplest, this allowed the emperor – or those in his circle – to identify military operations as religious crusades, particularly after the fact. Belisarius' spectacular success in North Africa, in 533-34 is a vivid case study. Probably intended only as a show of imperial force to reinstall a favoured puppet ruler over the western kingdom, the operation removed the Vandals from Carthage around a fortnight after the first imperial landing and deposed them entirely in about six months, thereby fashioning seven new western provinces from territories which had been out of imperial control for a century (Diehl 1896; Lassère 2015: 695-712). In the weeks that followed, Justinian made much of his position as a Catholic champion, who had restored the persecuted church in Africa from the 'Arian' Vandals. Stories circulated of martyrs who visited the emperor in dreams, and of local saints who welcomed his troops to Carthage. But these narratives were certainly retrospective: while the African Catholic (*homoousian*) church welcomed the imperial intervention, we should remember that Justinian's preferred Vandal puppet was probably himself an Arian, and so too were many of the imperial troops who had effected the reconquest (Merrills 2022; Merrills 2022b). As the imperial occupation of Africa progressed, moreover, the confessional differences between the imperial court, the army of occupation, and the theologically sensitive churches of the Latin West created innumerable further difficulties.

Elsewhere in Northern Africa, the relationship between religion, diplomacy and military strategy was differently formulated. In assessing these episodes, we are typically at the mercy of challenging textual sources, which often combine some confusion about the politics and even geography of the societies they are describing with some chauvinistic assumptions about Roman imperial power or the importance of the Christian message. For example, in around 531 CE Justinian followed the precedent of Justin and sponsored diplomatic missions to the Himyarite and Aksumite polities on either side of the Red Sea, in the hope of bringing both more closely into the imperial orbit and of gaining military and economic allies against Persian power in Arabia (Procopius, *Wars* I.19-20; cf. Malalas *Chron* 18.15, 18.56). Our sources disagree on the precise role played by the Church in determining this diplomacy, with some claiming that a shared faith motivated the emperors' appeals to the Red Sea rulers, others erroneously stating that the Aksumite king converted only as a result of imperial persuasion. But all agree that religious, economic and political ambitions were in some way entangled (Rubin 1960: 297-319; Kawar 1960; Engelhardt 1974: 27-41; Robin 2012: 281-6; Greatrex 2014).

A rather different picture emerges in Lower Nubia in the late 530s or early 540s. In his *Ecclesiastical History* written in the 570s, John of Ephesus conjures a vivid portrait of competing evangelical missions, one sent by the Monothelite Empress Theodora the other under the patronage of the Melkite (or Chalcedonian) Justinian (Engelhardt 1974: 44-70; Richter 2002: 29-40; Zacharopolou 2016). There are many reasons to doubt the details provided in John's history, who had himself been imprisoned for his Monothelite beliefs, having previously led a mission of his own, but here too Christian evangelism was evidently coupled with diplomatic initiatives. In John's telling, Justinian's preferred mission was unsuccessful (the Nubian rulers having already been converted to the rival sect), but his diplomatic gifts and requests for sustained peace on the Nile frontier were warmly regarded (Joh Eph. *HE* IV.6). Whatever their sympathies – or however profound their confusion – the sources of the period clearly recognized that evangelical, diplomatic and strategic issues were interconnected beyond the frontier.

Much the same is true of perhaps the least studied part of Justinianic religious activity in Northern Africa, the focus of attention in the present paper. The relatively sparsely populated oasis communities located between the Western Desert of Egypt and the Libyan Fazzan have

been the aim of recent archaeological investigation, but there is much that remains poorly understood, not least in the uneasy twilight of the pre-Islamic period (Sterry and Mattingly 2020). Distant as they were, however, these regions were not entirely forgotten by the policymakers or evangelists of sixth-century Constantinople. The evangelical effort in this region is known to us almost exclusively from a short passage at the start of book VI of Procopius' *Buildings*, his wide-ranging, panegyric survey of Justinian's construction projects across the empire (Procopius, *Buildings*, VI.2.14-3.13). Procopius alternates descriptions of urban fortifications which Justinian supposedly erected in the Pentapolis and Tripolitania with succinct portraits of the conversion of oasis communities and desert groups, particularly through the destruction of traditional temples and the erection of churches. Revealing as these passages are, however, their interpretation is compromised by some egregious geographical errors on Procopius' part, and by an almost total lack of corroborative archaeological information to support his account. As a result, the conversion narratives in *Buildings* have tended to be passed over within an embarrassed shrug in the scholarship or bundled into footnotes in support of contentions that Justinian had wider evangelical goals without interrogating these closely (Engelhardt 1974: 26-7).

It will be argued here that the episodes alluded to by Procopius can be fitted specifically with the aftermath of a local war between 546 and 548 CE, and that the very ambiguity of Procopius' account reveals something about the wider ideologies at play in the imperial discourse of the time. The passages in *Buildings* may not tell us very much about the lived religious practices in the oasis communities of the time, but they can tell us a great deal about contemporary understanding of the necessary interdependence of military power, diplomatic skill and religious practices, especially in the African frontier zone.

**Procopius *Buildings* VI.2: converting the desert**

The *Buildings* is perhaps the least immediately familiar of Procopius' three great works. Unlike the eight books of his *Wars* which systematically relate Justinian's campaigns in a classicizing style, or the *Secret History*, which undercuts this sober narrative with seamy stories of demonic apparitions and cuckoldry, *Buildings* is a work of clear panegyric intent (Cameron 1985: 84-112; Whitby 2022). It was probably completed in around 554 CE, although it may have been supplemented by later addenda, and celebrates Justinian's many building projects across the empire, particularly those related to military fortifications, water supply or churches (Greatrex 2013). Organized geographically, *Buildings* provides an impressively broad panorama of the empire, but it was by no means exhaustive in its coverage, nor is it completely reliable in its details.

Book VI of the *Buildings* is concerned with imperial constructions in North Africa, from Alexandria (which had never fallen out of imperial control), to the provinces of Tripolitania, Byzacena, Africa Zeugitana, Numidia and Mauretania which had been taken from the Vandals following Belisarius' campaigns of 533 and 534. (Roques 1994; Roques 1996). The book opens with an account of buildings in Alexandria and the Pentapolis of Cyrenaica, from Paratonium to Boreium. He then turns his attention to the interior, and specifically to Augila:

> And there are two cities which are known by the same name, each of them being called Augila. These are distant from Boreium about four days' journey for an unencumbered traveller, and to the south of it; and they are both ancient cities whose inhabitants have preserved the practices of antiquity, for they are suffering from the disease of polytheism even to my day. There from ancient times there have been shrines dedicated to Ammon and to Alexander the Macedonian. The natives actually used to make sacrifices there even up to the reign of Justinian. (Procopius, *Buildings* VI.2.14-17. tr. Dewing).

Procopius goes on to describe the temple slaves of the settlement, who were brought into imperial care, the conversion of the population as a whole and, ultimately, the construction of a Church to Theotokos – Mary, the mother of God:

> Indeed he [Justinian] by no means neglected to take thought for their material interests in an exceptional way, and also he has taught them the doctrine of the true faith, making the whole population Christians and bringing about a transformation of their polluted ancestral customs. Moreover he built for them a Church of *Theotokos* to be a guardian of the safety of the cities and of the true faith. (Procopius, *Buildings*, VI.2.19–20, tr. Dewing)

This is the fullest and most confusing of Procopius' references to the evangelism of the Libyan frontier region. As several commentators have pointed out, the account seems to conflate the Awjilah oasis complex with the better-known Siwa group several days' journey to the east (Wagner 1987: 349; Kuhlmann 1998: 174). The modern name *Awjilah* (أوجلة) corresponds much better with the toponym given by Procopius and with his geography: it is located a little more than 150 miles from the coast on the principal desert road. But no textual source other than Procopius attests to cult

centres to Ammon or Alexander there, nor is there any archaeological corroboration of this point (although detailed studies of the oasis group have been few-Mattingly *et al.* 2020: 127-8). Siwa, of course, was the location of a famous oracle of Ammon in classical antiquity and indeed was known by the name of that god in much classical writing. The oasis was also closely associated with Alexander, who had travelled there in order to claim his own descent from Ammon (Plutarch, *Alexander*, 28; Wagner 1987: 208-12; Fakhry 1990). It is certainly possible that there was also an oracle of Ammon at Awjila – that cult spread throughout the desert in classical antiquity – and perhaps even a temple to Alexander, but it seems more likely that Procopius here conflated the two oasis centres in his account (compare Brouquier-Reddé 1992: 130-56; Mattingly 1995: 168). His reference to the two 'cities' (*poleis*) called Augila may be a remnant of this confusion on the part of the historian or his source (although scholars have also noted that the modern Awjila complex has two principal foci which offers an alternative explanation) (Roques 1994: 263; Reynolds 2000: 173-4). There are no archaeological traces of a Justinianic church at either Siwa or Awjila, although there has been minimal work on late antique layers at the former, and little sustained excavation of any kind at the latter.

In the following chapters of *Buildings*, Procopius continues his survey of the regions surrounding the Syrtic Gulf. After an account of the supposed conversion of Boreium from its ancestral Judaism, he includes a second digression on the conversion of the barbarians of the interior:

> Here are the boundaries of Tripolis [Tripolitania] as it is called. It is inhabited by the barbarian *Marousioi*, a Phoenician race. Here too is a city Kidame by name; and in it live Romans who have been at peace with the Romans since ancient times. All these were won over by the Emperor Justinian and voluntarily adopted the Christian doctrine. These *Marousioi* are now called *pakatoi* because they have a permanent treaty with the Romans; for peace they call *pacem* (*pakem*) in the Latin tongue. Tripolis is twenty days' journey from the Pentapolis for an unencumbered traveller. (Procopius, *Buildings* VI.3.9-12. tr. Dewing (modified)).

Here again Procopius' geography seems confused. *Kidame* is surely to be identified with the Latin toponym *Cidamus* and hence with the modern oasis settlement of Ghadamis, close to the modern borders of Libya, Tunisia and Algeria, and now a UNESCO World Heritage site (Despois, Lanfry, Prasse 1998). But Ghadamis lies a little under 400 miles to the southwest of the modern capital of Tripoli, (and the ancient settlements of Oea and Sabratha). As such, Procopius apparently errs both in his positioning of *Kidame* between Boreium and Lepcis Magna in the westerly trajectory of his survey, and in his estimate of its distance from the Pentapolis. The oasis complex is somewhat better-known to archaeologists than is Awjila, but it remains significantly under-explored, despite its importance (Mattingly *et al.* 2020b: 195-8). Procopius does not attribute an active church building campaign to Justinian in the oases.

Procopius then describes the fortifications Justinian built at the coastal city of Lepcis Magna before turning to his third account of Christian conversion. He briefly recapitulates a narrative which is laid out much more fully in the *Vandal War*, describing the emergence of a group called *Leuathae* in the Vandal period, their occupation and abandonment of Lepcis, and finally the imperial victories over all of these groups across North Africa. The section ends with another short account of Christian conversion, not of the Leuathae, but of another group from the region:

> The barbarians who live close by [to Lepcis], those called Gadabitani, who up to that time were exceedingly addicted to what is called the Greek form of atheism, he has now made zealous Christians. He also walled the city of Sabratha, where he also built a very noteworthy church (Procopius, *Buildings*, VI.4.12-13, tr. Dewing).

This reference to the Gadabitani is another puzzle. The ethnonym strongly suggests a connection back to Ghadamis, and contemporary evidence may support this (Desanges 1962: 22, n.1). Corippus' *Iohannis* – an essential corroborative source on this region as we shall see – includes the 'men of Gadabis' among the Moorish groups who fought against the empire in 546, and further states that they hailed 'from savage city-walls'. (Corippus, *Ioh* II.117-8: *saeuis moenibus*). But this creates further problems with Procopius' account. (Modéran 2003: 659). The *Buildings* distinguishes *Kidame* and the *Gadabitani* geographically and suggests that the latter were located close to Lepcis rather than in the desert. He implies that the groups were subject to two distinct evangelical missions, and states clearly that *Kidame* had always been at peace with Rome: an assertion that would seem to be refuted by Corippus' contemporary account. Even if many apparent contradictions can be explained by the social and political complexity of these regions in the sixth century, the internal confusion of Procopius' account remains striking.

My point here is not to lament the shortcomings of Procopius' African geography, but rather to consider its implications. Greek, Roman, and Byzantine accounts of the African interior were almost never exact and

rejoiced much more in exotic toponyms (or evocative literary precedent) than in geographical precision. As such, Procopius is hardly an outlier. That writer moreover had little historical interest in the processes of Christian conversion, and those contemporaries who had, were often similarly allusive in their assertions of successful evangelism to distant regions. But for all of its impressionistic ambiguity, this short section of *Buildings* is helpful for illuminating an important aspect of Justinianic ideology. In the three passages just discussed, Procopius describes conversion of the local peoples (broadly grouped under the generic term 'Maurousioi' or 'Moors'), and specific groups among them. He associates them broadly with the whole of the interior from the Western Desert of Egypt to Ghadamis, notes the varied attitudes of these groups towards the Empire, and sets their conversion within a wider context of war and pacification. Irrespective of the specifics of each episode – and each poses problems, as we have seen – the simple fact that Procopius was content to provide such an impressionistic portrait of the wider frontier remains significant.

**Corippus: retrospective narratives**

Our other major source on Imperial-Moorish relations in this period is the *Iohannis* of Corippus, and this eccentric source provides an important context for the evangelism alluded to by Procopius (Zarini 2003; Merrills 2023). The *Iohannis* is an eight-book Latin epic poem, consciously modelled on Virgil's *Aeneid*. Corippus was certainly profoundly influenced by his reading in the classical canon, but the epic remains an important historical source in spite of these literary pretensions. Primarily concerned with the campaigns undertaken by the eastern Roman general John Troglita in Byzacena and western Tripolitania (modern Tunisia and north-western Libya) between 546 and 548 CE, the epic was first performed in Carthage in around 550 CE, and hence provides an unusually immediate narrative testimony of these events. The *Iohannis* is much the fullest historical account of John's military actions that survives to us - Procopius' own summary of these campaigns is only a few lines long, and contemporary chroniclers barely refer to these events at all (Procopius, *Wars* IV.28.45-51; Jordanes, *Romana* 385). It also provides unparalleled information on the ethnography and especially religious practices of 'Moorish' Northern Africa in the period (Modéran 2003; Merrills 2023: 128-171). Nor was Corippus an unthinking champion of imperial rule: the *Iohannis* frequently engaged critically with the mistakes and missteps of imperial governance. The epic reveals that the military crises within the region were the result of internal mutiny and rebellion, even as it claims that John's victories over 'Moorish' outsiders would bring a lasting and meaningful peace (Merrills 2022c).

Corippus used religious themes to make this wider political point. Throughout the epic, the imperial forces of John and his allies are presented as unambiguously Christian. Significantly, this was a Christianity that was defined above all by humility, piety and prayer, rather than by the knotty theological issues that so concerned many Church writers of the time (Merrills 2023: 218-34) Late antique poets rarely explored theological issues in depth in their work, and Corippus' reticence on this was doubtless also shaped by the profound sectarian divisions within the North African church at the time: the unfolding 'Three Chapters' controversy saw outspoken churchmen from Carthage and Numidia challenge the doctrinal authority of the imperial court over the later 540s and early 550s (Modéran 2007; Dossey 2016; Tommasi Moreschini 2017). Little of this appears at all in the lines of the *Iohannis*, which derives much of its narrative power from the bolder contrast between sober Christian worship and the captivating excesses of African polytheism.

If Corippus' Christians are frequently unanimated, his Moorish pagans are quite the opposite. This is illustrated most vividly by two long episodes in which Moorish leaders visit desert oracles in order to confirm their revolts against imperial power and receive some encouragement of their eventual success (the oracles themselves predict precisely the opposite, of course, but the Moors fail to notice this). (Zarini 1996; Merrills 2023: 245-50). The first of these visitations is made by one Guenfan on behalf of his infant son Antalas and has a dramatic date of around 500 CE (Corippus, *Ioh* III.77-140). After much wailing and gnashing of teeth, the oracle predicts Antalas' rise to greatness, the fall of the Vandal kingdom, his initial alliance with the imperial powers in Carthage and his eventual break from them. It is the course of Antalas' rebellion which occupies the first half of the *Iohannis*. The second oracle episode focuses on Carcasan, who journeyed 'to the Marmaridan edgelands, where horned Ammon lives' in search of divine support for the second phase of the Moorish campaign in 547 CE (Corippus Ioh VI.147: *Marmaridum fines, habitat quo corniger Ammon*). Again, Ammon provides a succinct account of the rebellion to come, including a prediction of Carcasan's eventual defeat, which the ill-fated leader fails to understand.

These passages are among the most memorable in the *Iohannis*, and deftly combine elements from a range of poetic antecedents: Virgil's description of the Sibyl and Lucan's of the witch Erichtho can be traced behind Corippus' verses, and the dramatic function of each also owes much to Silius Italicus' account of the oracular consultation at the time of Hannibal's birth in the *Punica* (Zarini 1996; Tommasi Moreschini 2001: 127-9). Even without these clear inter-texts, the imaginative element would be obvious enough – Corippus could

scarcely be describing these episodes at first hand, and it is unlikely that he would have drawn upon direct witnesses (Parke 1967: 232-3). There is also good reason to suspect that the first of the oracle visitations was entirely invented by the poet for dramatic purposes: Guenfan and Antalas probably hailed from the upland regions of central Byzacena, rather than the pre-desert fringe, and the political situation at the turn of the sixth century was scarcely conducive to revolt against Carthage (von Rummel 2010; Modéran 2003: 240). Carcasan's visit to the oracle in 547 is more plausible, however, and may have been based on an actual event. The leader himself had risen to command of the Laguatan alliance and probably originated in Syrtica or eastern Tripolitania, which makes a connection to pre-desert cult centres more likely (Zarini 1996: 188; Modéran 2003: 237-45). Perhaps more significantly, the oracular predictions of Carcasan's success appear multiple times over the course of the *Iohannis* and are presented as a motivating factor in the cohesion of the military alliance after 547 CE. It is not impossible that knowledge of this connection was made known to the Roman military commanders, and through them to the poet himself, however stylized his final epic rendering may have been.

The *Iohannis* includes other details of local religious practice in Northern Africa which seem inherently plausible. Corippus identifies the principal 'Moorish' gods as Ammon, who is very well attested in other sources; Sinifer whom he associates with the Roman god Mars and who appears as the syncretized Mars Cannapher in a late third-century inscription at Bu Njem; Gurzil who has somewhat tendentiously been associated with the cult site of Ghirza in the Wadi Zem Zem, but not otherwise known in either texts or archaeology; and Mastiman who is also unattested elsewhere (Tommasi Moreschini 2002; Tommasi 2021; Merrills 2023: 234-45). Details of their worship within the poem are fragmentary but scintillating. The nocturnal (human?) sacrifices to Sinifer and Mastiman before the climactic battle in Book VIII, for example, may well have been a poetic invention, and were clearly intended primarily as a pendant to the description of the sober Christian sacrifices in the Roman camp a few lines later (Corippus, *Ioh* VIII.304-317; Riedlberger 2010: 303-7; Gärtner 2013: 1244). Conversely, the vivid account of a sacred bull released as battle commenced in Book V has no clear poetic antecedent and may well have derived from the first-hand observations of Roman troops who were among Corippus' informants (Corippus, *Ioh* V.22-6). Details of divine statues borne in combat may also have come from the same source. In other cases, judgement is more difficult. Corippus introduces the military commander Ierna as both leader of the Laguatan in 546 CE and priest of Gurzil (Corippus, *Ioh* II.109-12) Ierna later performs a focal role in the first major conflict of the *Iohannis* and is eventually killed when fleeing the battlefield with a sacred statue of that god. (Corippus, *Ioh* V.493-502).

The precise nature of the Laguatan (elsewhere termed Ilaguas by the poet and certainly to be identified with the Leuathae of Procopius) has been much disputed in the scholarship. They would seem to have been a confederation or alliance of smaller groups and are particularly associated in the sources with Syrtica and Tripolitania, but connections with the Austuriani of the fourth-century texts and the Lawata of the Arabic sources remain speculative (Mattingly 1983; Modéran 2008; Merrills 2023: 144-152). Corippus' allusion to Ierna's position may well indicate that worship of Gurzil was an important factor in the maintenance of this alliance, at least in the mid-sixth century, but this is far from certain: the poet elsewhere names both Antalas and Carcasan as other Laguatan leaders, and both he more closely associates with Ammon than with Gurzil.

The *Iohannis* provides a wealth of compelling information on Moorish religious practices, but these details should not distract us from the wider message of his poem, and its historical significance in turn. Corippus' principal intention here was to provide a counterpoint to the sober seriousness of Christian Imperial Africa, and his captivating details - in turn unsettling, unfamiliar and deeply literary – also disguise a degree of simplification in his binary religious landscape. Corippus makes no reference at all to Christians among the belligerent Moorish forces, in spite of the fact that such groups must have existed on the ground. Equally tellingly, he is entirely silent on the religious sensibilities of the Moors who lent their support to the imperial cause, in spite of the fact that these local alliances were central to the political philosophy underpinning the poem; again, it is likely that many adherents to traditional religion would have mustered alongside John (Merrills 2023: 255-6). While Corippus may well have drawn upon authentic details in creating his portrait of African polytheism then, it is as well to remember that he was not an ethnographer, nor did he aspire to be one. While one of his oracle passages may well have drawn upon a historical episode, and the other have been an invention of the poet's own, both served the same dramatic purpose, and combined plausible details and literary motifs to do so. Corippus presented the military victories of John Troglita as a Christian success. The historical veracity of these episodes – and indeed the reliability of Corippus' details on pagan worship as a whole – are less relevant in this context than the broad outlines of this opposition. In the eyes of this African observer, and perhaps of his audience in Carthage, the military successes could be presented as a simple religious victory.

Here, we may return to the peculiar testimony of Procopius' *Buildings* on the evangelism of the desert. In the first place, Corippus' account provides us with by far the most likely historical context for any such oasis missions to have taken place. The immediate aftermath of 548 CE surely provided the imperial authorities (and hence the African church) with the means, motive and opportunity for such religious efforts that had not previously been feasible (Modéran 2003: 646-8; Merrills 2023: 252-4). The imperial religious programme in Africa was active but essentially undirected in the earliest years of the occupation, and sustained building activities only commenced from the time of Solomon's second prefecture in 539/540 CE (Pringle 1981; Durliat 1981). The plague in 542/3 CE clearly disrupted effective government substantially, and from around 544 CE the military and political position across much of North Africa was in disarray. After 548 CE, by contrast, the imperial forces had established something like peace across the region and may well have been able to consolidate this through diplomatic and religious efforts in the interior. If the Moorish alliances against the empire were particularly associated with the pagan cult centres of the region – as Corippus' poem suggests was the case – the practical and ideological value of these efforts would be all the more obvious. The likely composition of Procopius' *Buildings* in around 554 CE provides a *terminus ante quem* for these efforts, and again encourage a dating of these missions to around the later 540s.

## Conclusions: conversion and confusion on the frontier

John Troglita's victories in 548 brought a peace across Imperial Africa which seems to have lasted until almost the end of Justinian's reign (Pringle 1981: 39-41). Given the internal mutinies and frontier wars which had beset the region in the first few years of the occupation, this was no small accomplishment. The evidence provided by Procopius suggests that John's campaigns were followed by a programme of missionary activity in Tripolitania, Syrtica and perhaps the oasis communities beyond. Corippus' *Iohannis* in turn provides the context for this activity, and indeed the religious emphasis of the epic may have been inspired by these efforts. If evangelists were sent out to the oasis communities in the aftermath of victory, and delegates from the groups living in the pre-desert sought conversion for themselves, the motivation for retrospectively casting John's border wars of 546-548 CE in religious terms seems clear enough. This may have led Corippus to emphasize the 'pagan' underpinnings of the recent anti-imperial alliances, and particularly the role played by desert oracles in inspiring these movements. In this way, his epic celebration of Christian victory and the evangelical efforts which followed could be mutually reinforcing imperial power and the spread of the church marched in lockstep.

The accounts provided by Procopius and Corippus testify vividly to how the wider African frontier zone was conceptualized in Carthage and Constantinople, (and I think this region probably was understood as a 'frontier' by authors who lived a long way from it). But they are far less trustworthy as guides to actual religious practices across these territories. Procopius asserts that Christianity was brought to Augila and Kidame, but his account gives no indication of the processes of missionary activity, the nature of interactions with established religion, or indeed the lasting effects of these evangelical efforts. In part this can be explained by the genre in which Procopius was writing and the breadth of his scope – his was a panegyric portrait of building across the world and had little room for detailed scrutiny of such issues. But in fact, such assumptions were widespread in the evangelical accounts of the period, as the optimistic missionary narratives of John of Ephesus remind us (Engelhardt 1974: 12-19).

Attempting to clarify these textual accounts with reference to the archaeology can only get us so far. While it is certainly possible to interpret the later occupation layers at Ghirza with reference to the *Iohannis*, for example, or to argue that traces of Christian worship in pre-Islamic contexts in other oasis communities corroborate specific religious missions attested in our texts, such approaches risk obscuring the complexities of the archaeology and indeed simply explaining away the ambiguities in our textual sources. Stelae inscribed with Libyan letters, for example, have been found in the largest of the Ghirza temples and probably date to the middle of the sixth-century; they attest to a resurgence of cultic activity at that time, which seems to have been very different from the spectacular sacrifices and massive mausolea of the third and fourth centuries (Brogan and Smith 1984: 85, 232). Inscribed crosses on some of these stelae testify to a Christian presence of some sort in the oasis, but the precise correspondence between local cultic activity, Christian conversion and the political and military transformations of the mid-sixth century can only ever be speculative (Brogan and Smith 1984: 85, 250-1). Justinian's missionaries may well have been responsible for carving these crosses, and for bringing a nominal Christian worship to a site of long-standing significance, but so too might local power-brokers who sought the support of the Church to bolster their own power, isolated pockets of worshippers who made sense of their faith through reference to an existing sacred site, or an otherwise unknown group of iconoclasts (Mattingly 1995: 212-3; Modéran 2003: 291-2). Procopius and Corippus both state clearly that religious practice across the region was tremendously varied – and politically significant –

but this is about as far as they can go in helping us to interpret the significance of the Ghirza layers.

It would also be a mistake to use the developing archaeological record to try to make sense of the texts that survive to us – to explain away Procopius' confused image of Augila with reference to the evidence from Siwa, or identify Corippus' mysterious oracle sites simply as Ghirza (or indeed Augila). The ambiguity and confusion of our two major texts may be frustrating for historians and archaeologists alike, but these are features – not flaws – in their accounts of the frontier. Their broad-brush representations of a heathen hinterland, defined by mysterious gods, constantly changing human groups, and perplexing placenames, were themselves strategies for making sense of the fringes of imperial power. They provided simplified images of the geography or politics of the frontier regions, safe in the assumption that many of their readers may have shared their misconceptions or cared little for specific details. Recent scholarship has emphasized the 'fuzziness' of Roman frontiers, and the social, economic and political complexity of these vibrant regions far from the imperial capitals. But frontiers may never have been fuzzier than when viewed from these metropolitan centres.

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# The Malevolent Spirit of the Red Sea

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This title does not refer to an unpublished sequel to the adventures of the legendary Henry de Monfreid, who practised smuggling between the two shores of Bab el-Mandeb, under the very nose of British cruisers at the dawn of World War I. The title is inspired by a passage from the Greek rhetorician Aelius Aristides, who, in his 'Encomium on Rome' delivered in AD 144, praised the virtues of the Empire. A ceremonial discourse, highly codified by the rhetoric of the Second Sophistic, the text gave the speaker the opportunity to evoke the universal peace of that allegedly blessed era: 'Wars, people no longer believe they ever happened, and most hear of them as if they were mere myths. If by chance some did erupt somewhere at the borders — as is normal in a great and vast empire — because of the madness (παρανοία) of the Getae, the misfortune (δυστυχία) of the Libyans, or the malevolent spirit (κακοδαιμονία) of the dwellers beside the Red Sea, peoples incapable of enjoying the goods they possess, they are quickly over and no longer spoken of, just like myths'.[1]

The terms chosen by the rhetorician belong to the usual lexicon of writers from the classical world when they wish to describe barbarism and justify the Roman order. In this case, κακοδαιμονία — literally, the possession of the soul by an evil daemon — leads to a refusal of submission and the happiness that civilization inevitably brings. Of course, we know that this is a common topic. But, as rightful heirs of ancient thought, we all too often conceive the history of these 'peripheral' regions as that of a 'frontier' that needed military defence, with a 'within' that is policed and an 'outside' that is naturally aggressive and savage. In this respect, it is significant that the recent addition to the 'Frontiers of the Roman Empire' small volume series dedicated to the Easter Frontiers of the Roman Empire in the context of Arabia considers only the Bostra/Aila road, as if it were a European *limes,* conceived of as a line. Thereby, the volume ignores the deeper penetration into the Arabian Peninsula and the complexity of Roman policy in these regions, the variability and subtlety of relations between the Empire and the indigenous populations (Breeze *et al.* 2022). This excerpt from the encomium delivered by Aelius Aristides in what was at the time the world's capital offers us the opportunity for a critical re-examination of the sources on which our vision of a barbaric, reputedly ever-threatening periphery is based on (Figure 1).

**The 'big' history**

It is in fact Augustus himself who boasts in his monumental inscription of Ancyra of having conducted a double strategic expedition on both shores of the Red Sea; one reaching Napata, near Meroë, and the other Mariba in the land of the Sabaeans (Res Gestae Divi Augusti 5, 26). 'In both nations,' he wrote, 'great masses of enemies have been destroyed in battle, and several strongholds have been taken'. Nevertheless, the account of these events given by Strabo (16, 4, 22-24) is less glorious, as we know, and the Augustan attempt did not continue thereafter, or at least it did not translate into territorial control. The attempt was never renewed, at least according to Cassius Dio (53, 29). Trajan may have had the project in mind, if it is indeed what a frequently cited passage of Eutropius (Breviarium 8, 3) alludes to, in which the ageing Emperor was said to have built a fleet in the Red Sea to raid the coasts of India. However, the geographical context of this event is uncertain: the term *mare rubrum* may indeed apply to the vast maritime space ranging from the Persian Gulf to the coast of Somalia and Ceylon, not just to the Red Sea, and India could point to all the shores of these seas. In any case, such a grandiose project was out of the question upon the advent of Hadrian. It is one of the reasons why I formerly refused to consider the existence of a specific squadron charged with performing maritime policing between the shores of Arabia and Africa (Reddé 1986, 270-271). Nevertheless, a recent review of previously known papyrological sources necessitates us reopening this file.

Strabo's testimony (16, 4, 23) concerning the venture of Aelius Gallus, who commanded the Arabian expedition in 24 BC, is clear: the Prefect of Egypt had built war vessels (80 biremes and triremes) for this adventure. This was a mistake, says the geographer, because no naval battle was to be expected since there was no adversary at sea. Yet, the Roman general staff undoubtedly hoped to shorten the trip by transporting the soldiers on the deck of galleys, which was common practice at the time (Reddé 1986, 349-356), especially since there were scarcely any ports on the Arabian coast, other than at Leukè Komè, whose exact location remains uncertain, even today. Furthermore, to have

[1] Panegyric of Rome (70), translation by Pernot 2007, modified by the author.

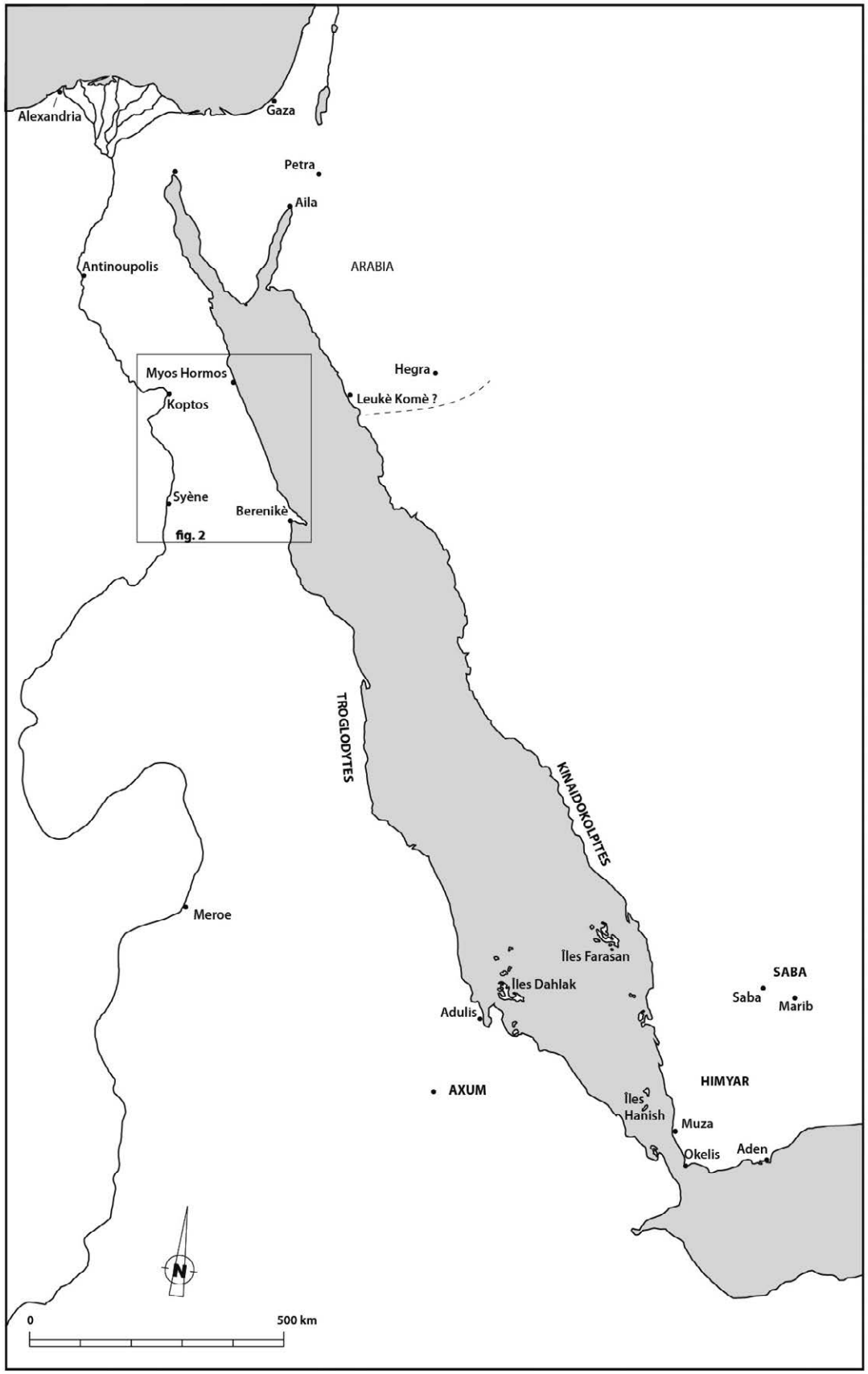


Figure 1. General map of the Red Sea (M. Reddé).

a large army of 10,000 men travel overland for a very long distance in a country without water and without local supplies along the way seems like pure madness because everything would have to be transported. The use of long vessels was highly discouraged, given the conditions of navigation in the Red Sea. In the end, the Romans had to resort to using merchant ships. The return, fortunately, was easier, thanks to a direct crossing between Leukè Komè and Myos Hormos. Was this the beginning of a permanent naval presence in these waters?

Dario Nappo (2015) would like to believe so. The review by Gabriella Messeri (2004-2005) of two ostraca from the famous papyrological dossier of the archives of Nicanor seems to support this, at first glance. The ostracon O. Petrie 296 indeed mentions a certain Lucius Claudius, trierarch, to whom packages (γόμους) are delivered at Myos Hormos or Berenice. In a second document, which is a grain receipt (O. Petrie 279), Satornilos, *tesserarius liburnae* (τεσσαράριος λυβέρνου), writes to a certain Eponichos to confirm the receipt of the shipment in year 13 of Tiberius. To this short list, one can now add the mention of a trierarch of a τεσσαραρία (*tesseraria navis*), whose presence is attested in 93 AD at Myos Hormos and who signs a loan contract preserved on a papyrus (Van Rengen 2011, n° 004). Michael A. Speidel would see this as confirmation of the existence of a Roman naval presence in the Red Sea (Speidel 2015, 95).

However, should we link all these disparate sources together? One may be surprised that a regularly constituted squadron, whose command was integrated into the career path of equestrian prefects and officers, left, as yet, no epigraphic trace of its existence throughout the Empire. Certainly, we have very few sources on the different provincial fleets, but importantly, we do have some.[2] I therefore remain in favour of my previous position of denying the existence of an autonomous fleet of the Red Sea for lack of epigraphic evidence.[3] This does not mean that there were no military boats and officers in these waters, of which there is naturally a papyrological testimony here and there, like the ones just mentioned. In his commentary on the papyrus of Myos Hormos, Van Rengen adopted a cautious position, echoed also by Lionel Casson on the role of the very poorly known *naves tesserariae* (Casson 1973, 135). Our only source a bilingual inscription from Samos (Dessau 9220), dated to 20 BC, which mentions a *praef(ectus) tesserar(iarium)* in Asia *nau(ium).* That these boats were used to carry official dispatches is likely; but that they constituted a regular service of the *cursus publicus* is another matter; finally, whether they were warships is yet another matter (Reddé 1986, 449-450). The presence of trierarchs in two of these papyrological testimonies and a tesserarius in the last case thus does not allow, in itself, to reconstruct the existence of a regular squadron, moreover dating back to the operations of Aelius Gallus: it could be just as well that officers detached from the Alexandria fleet boarded merchant ships bound for India. Indeed, we know from Pliny (NH 6, 101) that the dangers of piracy, especially significant in the southern Red Sea, were combated by boarding archers. That there was a trierarch, a centurion or other officers to accompany them should therefore not be surprising.

The dangers of Bab el-Mandeb could also not be prevented from a port situated as far away as Myos Hormos (Quseir al-Qadim), which is about 2500/3000 km away in a straight line, or even from Berenike. In the Life of Apollonios of Tyana (35), written for Iulia Domna and concerning events that were supposed to take place around the middle of the first century A.D., Philostratus describes large cargo ships that traded with India. These were reportedly specially built to face the dangers of offshore navigation in the violent winds of the monsoon: 'A large number of pilots are in charge of this ship, under the command of the oldest and most skilled; moreover, at the prow, there are several officers and sturdy and skilful sailors to manoeuvre the sails; there is even, on this ship, a detachment of soldiers because one must foresee the defence of the boat against the barbarians of the Gulf, who are on the right, when one enters it, in case they would attack this ship at sea.[4]

On the right, entering the Red Sea and north of al-Hudaydah, is the Farasan archipelago. In the time of Monfreid, piracy was still practised there. It is almost opposite the Gulf of Adulis, on the African side. It is not necessary to go back here in detail to the dossier of Latin inscriptions that pertain to this. However, it is important for our purpose to recall that, in 144, a vexillation composed of the Legio II Traiana Fortis and its auxiliaries came to build a Roman fort in these islands at the end of the world.[5] Now, 144 is also the date of the Encomium on Rome by Aelius Aristides; and the legion at work is that of Alexandria.

It is quite tempting to link the reference of the Greek rhetorician to these events, which must have been known in Rome, but which are ultimately of minor historical importance. As François Villeneuve rightly emphasised, the reference was probably not about

[2] See, for example, the list of known prefects in 1986, which would need to be updated, in Reddé 1986, pp. 676-677.

[3] Saddington 2017 has recently reached the same conclusion.

[4] Translation P. Grimal (1973).

[5] Several successive readings have been proposed, which is due to the poor preservation of the stone, especially in lines 5 and 6. Most recently, see Villeneuve 2007 and the corrections suggested by Speidel 2007. However, one can disregard Bukharin 2005-2006 and 2011, particularly the discourteous invectives that pepper the end of the latter article.

conquering Axoum (from the Arabian Coast), nor the kingdoms of Saba, Qataban, and Himyar, but rather to protect the lucrative trade with India. In this respect, we must remember that, at that time, merchant ships were not escorted, except possibly over very short distances. This was also not achieved by chasing pirates from the sea using scant available maritime patrols, but by controlling the pirate bases on land. This is a consistent naval policy of which we have many examples in Roman antiquity, necessitated by the limited range of long ships, which were unable to stay at sea for more than a few days without making a stopover. This was the reality of all the galleys until the era of Louis XIV (Reddé 1986, 412-416). An increase in captures of merchant vessels in these waters could therefore legitimately lead to a punitive expedition, conducted in this case from Egypt, and to the establishment of a garrison on-site. Of course, a minimum number of ships were needed to ensure links with the continent. But for that, one could make do with local boats, including small light vessels, more effective in these waters, as the adventures of Monfreid still illustrate[6]. The continuation of surveys and ongoing excavations in Farasan will undoubtedly provide more information on the context of these operations.[7]

One may naturally wonder why the Roman high command chose to use the legion from Alexandria on this occasion and not that of Bostra, even though at that time the province of Arabia extended up to Hegra/Madâ'in Sâlih. The discovery of a small Roman military fort (85m x 65m) at this location, integrated into the walls of the old Nabatean city and occupied by the army from the first half of the 2nd century AD, constitutes an important discovery that radically changes our perception of the Roman occupation in the Arabian Peninsula.[8] The available Latin inscriptions show the presence of a vexillation of the legio III Cyrenaica whose soldiers controlled this station and the caravan traffic at least until the middle of the 3rd century (Fiema, Villeneuve, Bauzou 2020). They played a role similar to that of the already known outposts of Azraq or al-Jawf (Dumata). But the modest garrison of Hegra probably did not have sufficient resources to extend its activities to the Farasan. Besides, the involvement of the legion from Egypt to the south of the Red Sea may simply mean that this region was not part of the province of Arabia and that the available troops were used. It was essentially a large police operation against coastal pirates who traditionally lived by attacking passing boats, not an attempt to conquer the entire south of the peninsula.

It may also be from this perspective that we must consider the warlike declarations of an unknown sovereign of Axoum, reproduced on the throne of Adulis, according to the testimony of Cosmas Indicopleustes who copied them around 518 A.D or 519 A.D. The king boasts of having fought the Arabs and the Kinaidokolpites who lived along the coast between Leukè Komè and the kingdom of Saba by sending a fleet and an army (RIÉth. I, 277). The date of this inscription has been much disputed. Christian Julien Robin, followed by Michael A. Speidel, proposes the Severan period.[9] This is plausible, if one considers the diplomatic relations between Abyssinia and the kingdom of Saba. These are the main arguments for dating these events before 220 AD. Yet, if it is just a naval police operation carried out from Adoulis to clean the islands and the closest Arabian coast, at 350/400 kilometres away, the historical significance of the event and its dating can perhaps be relativised. The importance we give to this famous and mysterious, yet unique, source can easily distort our interpretation of the facts.

## The 'little' history

Archaeological excavations carried out over the past thirty years in the Eastern Desert of Egypt have yielded a large number of new papyrological documents, primarily ostraca, which are of main interest in providing largely unprecedented information on daily life in the military outposts of these regions (Figure 2). This documentation, unfortunately, has no equivalent on the side of the Arabian Peninsula but it obviously existed, and it would undoubtedly be important to target in future excavation campaigns. Naturally, one must ask what is specific about the ostraca evidence and whether the information they provide can truly be incorporated into the 'great' history narratives, to use Hélène Cuvigny's expression (Cuvigny 2021, n° 1).

Let's begin by briefly recalling how and at what chronological rhythm the caravan routes that connected the warehouses of Koptos on the Nile to the two main ports of the Red Sea, Myos Hormos (Qusseir al-Qadim) and Berenice were unloaded. After all, this is where the goods from India, the Somali coast and Aden were unloaded.[10] In the Augustan period, the

[6] There are various examples of militarized ships belonging to the legionary corps and not to an established squadron. See, for instance, Sarnowski 1986.

[7] I do not comment here on the second inscription discovered in Farasan (AE 2005, 1640), due to its highly fragmentary nature and the interpretative challenges it raises, such that even its date seems to me very uncertain. To this day, the restoration proposed in Villeneuve 2007 remains the most reasonable, in the absence of anything better.

[8] Regarding the military post, see Fiema, Villeneuve 2018 and the online excavation reports from the mission led by Laïla Nehmé (most recently Nehmé *et al.* 2021; Fiema 2025).

[9] Robin 1989; Cuvigny 2021, n° 26; Speidel 2015; 2016a

[10] We will not go into detail here about these arrangements, which have been abundantly described in Cuvigny *et al.* 2003 and then in Brun 2018. For the history of this road, see also De Romanis 1996, which contains some divergent perspectives, the discussion of which is revisited in Cuvigny *et al.* 2003.

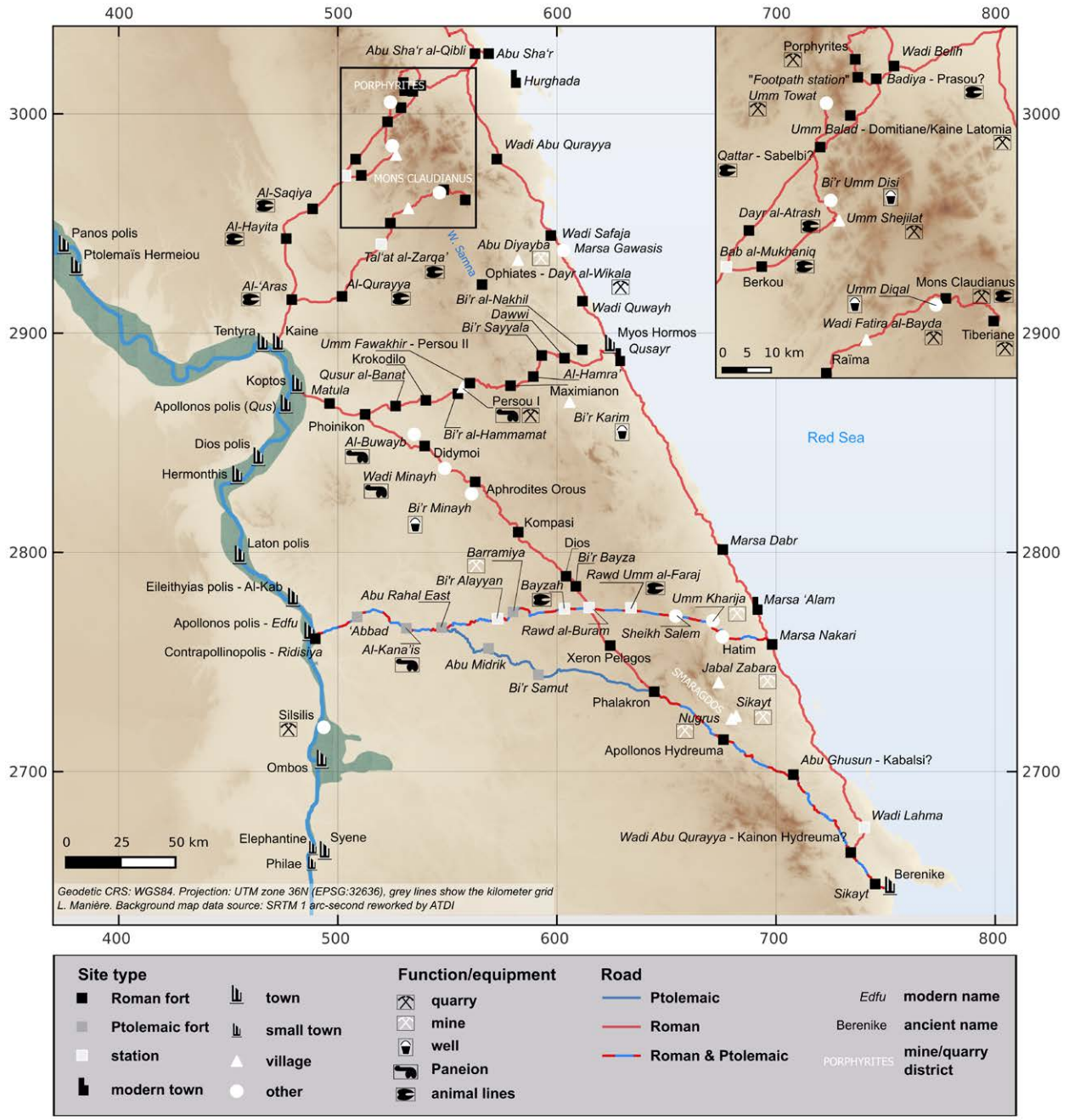


Figure 2. Map of Roman occupation in the eastern desert of Egypt (© Louis Manière, ERC Desert networks, 2020).

previous Ptolemaic installations were still in use. At that time, the nomads of the desert were calm (Strabo, 16, 1, 45; 53). In other words, at that point the caravans of Nicanor circulated without special protection. A famous inscription from Koptos (ILS 2483 = I.Portes 56), undated,[11] mentions work in the desert by a significant vexillation composed of two legions and their auxiliaries, amounting to about 1400 men. This detachment was responsible for a series of developments in the middle of the desert, including the building and dedication of water cisterns (lacci) on sites that already existed in the Ptolemaic era (Apollonos Hydreuma, Compasi, Berenice, and Myos Hormos), as

[11] Kennedy 1986. The interpretation of the ending (castram aedificaverunt et refecerunt) continues to be obscure (cf. Cuvigny *et al.* 2003, 269). A. Bernand had developed a picturesque castra m(ulta). Cuvigny considers that it refers to the fort at Coptos, but then one does not know what to make of the word refecerunt because one cannot both build and restore a fort. Personally, I think it is an error made by a stonemason who knew Latin poorly and confused the neuter plural with the feminine singular, like our students sometimes tend to do...

well as the construction and repair of fortlets.[12] Pliny the Elder, who wrote between 50 A.D. and 76-77 A.D., mentions only the Koptos/Berenice route, describing a total of eight stages of the route (NH VI, 102-103). He is still unaware of the construction of the three small forts at Didymoi, Berenice, and Sikayt that a series of new inscriptions have dated to the year 77 A.D. (Bagnall, Bülow-Jacobsen, Cuvigny 2001). Finally, the fort of Dios/Iovis and not Jupiter (Abu Qurrayah) was built under Trajan, in 115-116 A.D. (Cuvigny 2021, n° 31). The addition of these two routes linking Koptos to the ports of Berenice and Myos Hormos thus extended over a long period, which does not attest to a situation of urgency and a 'grand policy' aimed at immediately managing the Eastern trade of the Empire.

Among the thousands of ostraca extracted from the dumps of these various praesidia, none mentions a regular escort of caravans, which passed without leaving any significant traces in this written documentation. Without the texts of Strabo and Pliny, we would have great difficulty reconstructing, with the aid of archaeology and papyrology, this major flow of luxurious products that transited the Red Sea. In this desert, the main concern was to arrange and guard water points. Each fortlet is thus built around a central well, with barracks leaning against the rampart (Reddé 2018). But these small posts only housed modest garrisons, which probably never exceeded about thirty men at one given time, including infantry and cavalry (Cuvigny *et al.* 2003, 308-309). The troops from different garrisons of the valley, were accompanied by a small number of 'civilians' involved in local supply, among whom were prostitutes who circulated between the different posts (Cuvigny 2021, no. 24). It was not, overall, a very robust defensive system. The important thing was to provide the caravans with well-equipped stops, which were well supplied with water. The objectives were to be able to transmit news regularly between the coast and the valley (by solitary horsemen), to ensure the safety of the tracks against small groups of Bedouins who could sometimes, but not systematically, prove aggressive (Cuvigny 2021, no. 16). A task of military policing, in essence.

It is not really until the time of Trajan that we begin to have evidence of troubles, generally very localized.[13] Most often described as *barbaroi* in the ostraca, the nomads appear in small groups. In 108 A.D., in the sector of Mons Claudianus, we find an attestation of 18 *barbaroi* who had taken 50 camels. They were pursued by three horsemen and infantrymen who suffered some losses, including one being beaten with sticks (O. Krok. I, 6). In 109 A.D., a new skirmish caused some casualties among the Romans and the death of 61 barbarians (O. Krok. I, 47). A more serious fight, in 118 A.D., is known by the name of the material on which the events were recorded, 'the amphora of the barbarians' (O.Krok. I, 87). This is a series of circulars that mention a heated affair at the fort of Patkoua, unsuccessfully besieged by 60 barbarians. A Roman footman and two horsemen seem to have been killed, a woman, and two children abducted, another killed. The news then circulates from fort to fort, the men are confined (an old military habit...) and the supply convoys escorted.

The most serious incident took place under Hadrian when Sulpicius Serenus, prefect of the desert of Berenice (*praefectus Montis*) who also commanded the ala of the Voconces, in garrison at Koptos, won a great victory, celebrated, this time, by a rock inscription from the Wadi Hammamat. A person of this rank is entitled to some solemnity, especially when he has pursued relentlessly for two days these Agriophagi (*nequ/issimos quorum fere pars mai/or in pugna perit neque vulnera/to nec relicto m[i]lite praedam/que totam cum camelis a[b]stulit*) (I.Pan 87). In this case, these Agriophages appear to have been formed of a band coming from south of Berenice, but the glorious deeds of warfare like that of Sulpicius Serenus remained fortunately localized and limited in time. In fact, the enemy managed to only mobilise a few dozen men at most each time, and the security of the Empire does not seem to have ever been threatened. After the reign of Hadrian, we no longer have mention of such operations, but this may be a matter of sources. We do not know, for example, whether the *rebelliones <apud> Aegyptum* mentioned by the biographer of Antoninus, among other disturbances in the provinces, allude to difficulties that occurred in the Eastern desert, or in the valley or in the delta's Fayoum, or in Alexandria (SHA, Vita Antonini 5, 4).

However, it is evident that the control of the nomadic population was serious and well-executed, marked by a meticulous bureaucracy that reveals much about the daily practices of the Roman army. An ostracon from Mons Claudianus (O.Claud. 7309), datable to the mid-2nd century A.D., tells us that the men at a post located on the banks of the Nile in Dodecaschene (upstream of Aswan) are monitoring the movements of a group of five barbarians and two camels descending the river on the opposite bank. Such minute information travels northward all the way to Mons Claudianus (Cuvigny 2021, n° 28, 443-451). We find a nearly identical instance

[12] The inscription I.Portes 56 is likely to be later than the beginning of Tiberius's reign since it mentions only two legions. However, according to Michael P. Speidel, the departure of the third legion from Egypt must be dated between the end of Augustus's reign and the year 23 (Speidel 1984). The inscription is probably also earlier than 77 since it does not list the praesidia built at that time. It could therefore be Flavian, as suggested by Alston 1995, 30, especially since one of the soldiers carries the Flavius gentilic. Pliny's text could allude to this operation mentioned by I.Portes 56. However, the argument is not conclusive.

[13] For a comprehensive overview, in addition to the regularly cited O.Krok. file (Cuvigny 2005), see the summary by Cuvigny 2021 no. 27.

of a similar routine task performed by the garrison of Bu Ngem, in Tripolitania (O. Bu Ngem 71; 147).

The relationship between the Roman army and the inhabitants of the desert was not always marked by hostility, but rather by a kind of policing suspicion. This is indicated by an ostracon from Maximianon (al-Zarqa) on the road to Myos Hormos. It notes the transit of one of the residents of the Red Sea coast, a Kinaidokolpite from the Arabian side, leaving the small fort with a pass, around the middle of the second century (Cuvigny 2021, n° 26). Although a certain reinforcement of defences in some praesidia (narrowing of gates and access to towers, addition of claviculae) can be observed, likely during the 3rd century A.D, the feeling is not one of a state of siege. In the last years of occupation at Xèron, which probably took place under Gallienus, documents concerning the allocation of wheat to the Blemmyes by the Roman garrison suggest a relatively peaceful cohabitation (Cuvigny 2022). However, at the same time we should remember that this practice was old. It had already been observed on a papyrus discovered at Berenice and dated to the second half of the 1st century AD.[14]

## The state, the army, and the control of trade with the world of the Erythraean Sea

Is it possible to link together all these disparate sources, of very different levels, and paint a coherent picture of a great imperial policy, against the backdrop of the luxury product trade between the Mediterranean and the countries bordering the Erythraean Sea – Arabia, East Africa, India, or even China? Since the publication of the famous papyrus from Muziris,[15] there has been no shortage of publications offering multiple perspectives on Rome's relations with this fabulous East. It is not a question of providing a detailed review here, but rather to share some modest reflections.

One must naturally begin by questioning the war's goals and objectives of Augustan policy in these regions. However, these motives seem quite different depending on whether one considers the text of the Res Gestae, the official record of achievements of Augustus written entirely to his own glory, or that of Strabo, personal friend of Aelius Gallus (16, 4, 22). The monument of Ancyra appears to place the conquest of Germania, on one hand, and that of Arabia Felix and Ethiopia, on the other hand, on identical scales, within the grand framework of an imperium over the entire world. Yet, if we are to believe Strabo, the objective was more modest. The objective involved a form of armed exploration (διαπειρασόμενον), like that which Cornelius Balbus would later undertake in the heart of Africa. In this respect, the geographer clearly states that commercial concerns and the riches of Arabia constituted Rome's war aims, with the objective of establishing some form of protectorate over the whole area. However, as Matthew A. Cobb rightly points out, this already flourishing by the end of the Ptolemaic period trade does not seem to have ever been threatened by the powers established in these regions (Cobb 2018; 2019).

One could certainly ask the same question about the policy of Trajan. To define it, Andrew Wilson links the conquest of the Nabatean kingdom in 106 A.D., the opening of the Bostra-Aila route, the refurbishment of the canal between the Nile and the Red Sea, the ambition to construct a fleet, and the aspirations for expansion to India (Wilson 2015). Yet, one could easily argue that the old Nabatean royal road already existed by 106 A.D. and that the canal does not appear to have been of much use for high-seas commerce. Its mouth was poorly located, too far north for the ships of the time, which were ill equipped for sailing into the wind (Aubert 2019). As for accepting that Trajan wanted to build a fleet, this would lead to the conclusion that there was not already one in existence, contrary to the opinions of many other commentators who insist on its necessity for controlling and protecting trade in the Red Sea from the Augustan era onwards. I have expressed my views on this matter earlier. The discovery of the Farasan inscriptions certainly completes the vision of a grand imperial policy, but one can also be content to see a measure of circumstance, perhaps ephemeral, especially if one dates the Adulis monument from the Severan period, which is not really compatible with the presence of a significant Roman force opposite Abyssinia.

We can see how putting these various sources into perspective can lead to subjective interpretations. This is even more true if we add the information that can now be drawn from the excavations and papyrological documentation of Egypt's Eastern Desert. Initially, perhaps until the beginning of the Flavian dynasty—if we date the inscription I.Portes 56 to this period, which is uncertain—the caravans continued to cross the Eastern Desert without the Empire really worrying about rearranging the existing tracks. One camped in the desert (in monte) and very often carried one's own water. The new praesidia appear gradually during the Flavian period, but while the army is indeed present, it does not collect tolls, control commerce,[16] and does not escorts the caravans, as proven by the 'Koptos tariff', a large inscription dated to the prefecture of Mettius

[14] O. Berenike III 266. Regarding the late control of Berenice, see now Ast 2024.

[15] P. Vindob. G 40822. See De Romanis 2020, with the earlier bibliography.

[16] Contrary to the opinion of Young 2001, 72-73, written it is true before the publication of the first collections of ostraca from the eastern desert.

Rufus, in 90 (I. Portes 67). At the entrance to the desert, on the road to Myos Hormos, it is the tax farmers (μισθωτὰς) who collect the dues (even if they were probably supported by a guard of soldiers). Private guards ([φυλ]άκους) are also documented, reflecting the responsibility of carriers in terms of security, as stated in the papyrus of Muziris (Cobb 2018, 111).

It is only from the reign of Trajan and until Hadrian that this desert of the Tartars seems to suffer from local troubles, but it is also true that this could be an effect of the availability of sources, mostly related to the excavation of the Krokodilô rubbish dump, whose accumulation only begins under Trajan. However , the fort could well have been built as early as Vespasian.[17] The other sites have not delivered the same type of information, even if private documents from Mons Claudianus, Didymoi, and Xèron occasionally mention that the 'barbarians' are sometimes restless. But are they any more so than elsewhere? The much-praised 'Roman peace', especially in the formal discourse of Aelius Aristides, was continuously disturbed, from within, by recurring acts of banditry, even in Italy as multiple sources attest.[18] Overall, these sources do not lead us to envisage an Eastern Desert plagued by insecurity and in need of strong military measures, which the small garrisons could not have managed. We see, through the prosperity of Berenice as revealed by the excavations, that commerce continued to flourish (Sidebotham 2011). As for the construction of the fort of Qusûr al-Banât, likely under Septimius Severus, it filled a gap between Laqueîta and Krokodilô, where the distance was very long, and is not necessarily related to the reinforcement of threatened security. Personally, I would tend to consider, purely to provoke thought, that the increased arrangement of these tracks reflects more the development of commerce with India from the time of Vespasian, rather than an accumulation of new threats.

## Conclusion

The vast area of the Red Sea — in the modern and narrow sense of the term — was certainly a border of the Empire, but of a particular kind, very different from those encountered in Europe or even along the Euphrates. This was a complex landscape, cantered around a nearly enclosed maritime domain, but where not all the lands were directly subject to Roman authority, where difficult navigation made the formation of a war fleet improbable (and, in any case, very uncertain) and where security measures were local, as can be seen in Egypt but also in Arabia. Where the power of Rome could not be directly exercised, the policy of amicitia with the indigenous powers replaced brute military force, all the way to India (Speidel 2009; 2015; 2016a/b). Thus Charibaêl (Karib'îl), king of the Himyarites and the Sabaeans, is hailed with the title of friend (φίλος) of the emperors in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (23). We see the South Arabian kingdoms minting coins with the effigy of Augustus or Julio-Claudian emperors. Certain Indian rulers did the same, portraying themselves on the obverse, seated on a curule chair, similar to numerous indigenous reguli like those from the pre-Roman southeastern Britain (Braund 1984; Creighton 2000; Burton 2011). From this point of view, at least, the expedition of Aelius Gallus had not been a failure. It had established long-lasting mutually beneficial political and economic relations between the inside and outside of the Empire, in a region where the border could not be an iron curtain.

[17] Cuvigny *et al.* 2003, 77-91, but perhaps much later regarding the abandonment.

[18] See MacMullen 1992, 255-268. On banditry in the East, Wolff 2003 will be profitably consulted

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# Torcs Transformed: A Fresh Look at Late Iron Age and Romano-British Beaded Torcs

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Torcs, particularly golden ones, are a totemic symbol of the Iron Age, both in the popular imagination today and in ancient views of 'Celts'. In Britain this torc tradition was transformed after the Roman conquest, with overwhelming use of copper alloy rather than the precious metals that had dominated before. Regional styles of neck ornament developed (Figure 1). South-west England and southern Wales saw the hinged (or Wraxall) collar, the two parts joining at front and back; these often bear curvilinear Iron Age-style decoration (Megaw 1971; Nowakowski *et al.* 2009). The beaded torc is similarly bipartite and annular, but constructed differently: typically it has a plain or minimally decorated hoop joined to a separate beaded portion at the front. It is found over much of the province from the Severn-Wash line to the Forth-Clyde isthmus, but is absent in the south-east of England (MacGregor 1976: 97–99; Hunter 2010: fig. 1). Research by Michael Marshall (2021) has revealed a third Romano-British torc type in south-eastern England north of the Thames, which he christened the Baldock type after one of the key findspots. This is a rather plainer style, a thin penannular rod or strip with simple geometric decoration on the slightly expanded terminals. Its distribution concentrates in Hertfordshire, with a spread from London to Norfolk.

The dating evidence for all three puts their origins in the first century AD, with beaded torcs certainly continuing through the second century. Hinged and beaded torcs may have their origins a little before the Roman conquest, but they do not have deep Iron Age roots. Instead, they represent a reimagining of the precious-metal torc tradition in the context of conquest. Distinctive pieces of personal ornament were created which embodied an older tradition but adapted it for new circumstances, representing regional identities within Roman Britain (Hunter 2010: 94; 2015: 140–141; Marshall 2021). The social distribution of beaded torcs shows that they were used widely, within military communities, on rural settlements, in towns, and beyond Hadrian's Wall in prestige Iron Age contexts.

Since last reviewing the topic in 2010, numbers of beaded torcs have almost doubled, from 44 to 74. Most are metal-detecting finds reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme, with a few from excavations. The increase allows a more considered view of their typology, distribution, development and meaning, but two particular discoveries have prompted this return to the topic: the find of a beaded portion reused on a necklace in a Romano-British burial at Lathbury, Buckinghamshire; and an example decorated in atypical style from East Yorkshire. We shall turn to these after reviewing the two main types of beaded torc.

## Type A torcs

Morna MacGregor (1976: 97–99) split beaded torcs in two, subsequently labelled A and B. Type A has separate beads threaded onto an iron rod and slotted into a hoop; in type B, the beaded portion was cast in one. There are now 21 examples of type A and 53 of type B, plus one hybrid between beaded torcs and hinged collars (from Dinnington, South Yorkshire; Beswick *et al.* 1990).

Recent discoveries of Type A consist entirely of stray beads. These were divided into six types by Alexandra Croom (1998, 12), but a number of her types have only a single example, and for broader analysis they are best classed in two broad groups (Figure 2): those with ribbed decoration (type A1; horizontal or angled; 7 instances); and those resembling vertebrae with (typically) four lobes, the edges often decorated (type A2; 14 instances).[1]

These two bead types show differing distributions, especially if examples from three Roman military sites on or near Hadrian's Wall are initially disregarded on the grounds that they could have been brought by members of the military community from elsewhere in Britain (Figure 3). Type A1 comprises all four Scottish finds along with the examples from Ireland, north Wales and Lancashire, forming a northern and Irish Sea distribution. If the Hadrian's Wall examples are ignored, type A2 clusters in south-western Britain (Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, three in southern Wales, two in Wiltshire) with a spread to the north-east represented by a find from Lincolnshire and three examples from Yorkshire. The two types represent different regional traditions.

## Type B torcs

New finds also allow more to be extracted from type B torcs. One can identify a core type (B2) with

[1] One find is not published in sufficient detail to identify.


Figure 1. The distribution of different styles of Romano-British torc. Top left: beaded. Top right: hinged. Bottom left: Baldock

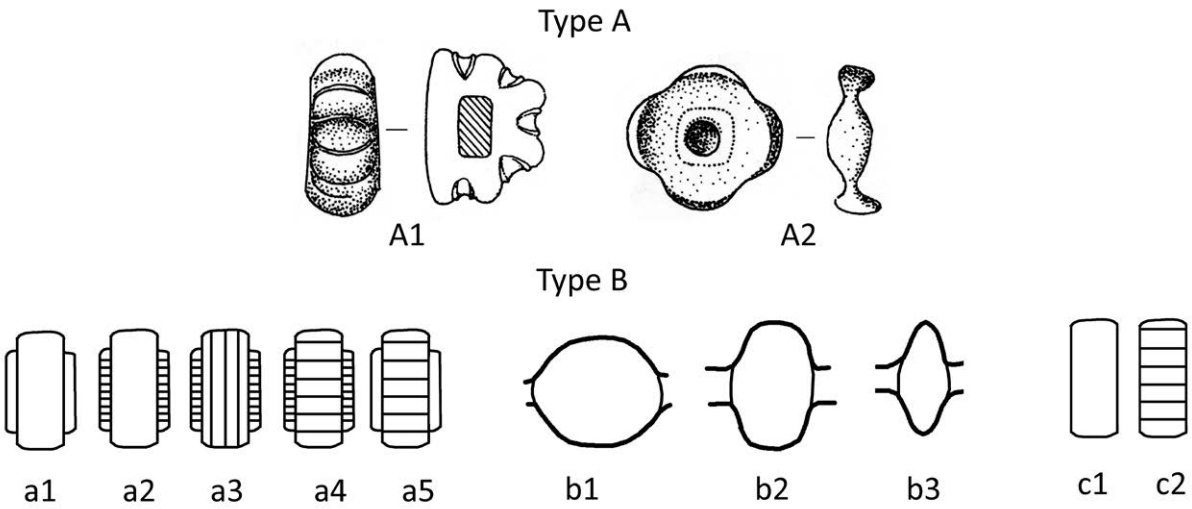


Figure 2. The main categories of torc beads in type A and B torcs. A1-2, modified from MacGregor 1976, nos 198 and 202

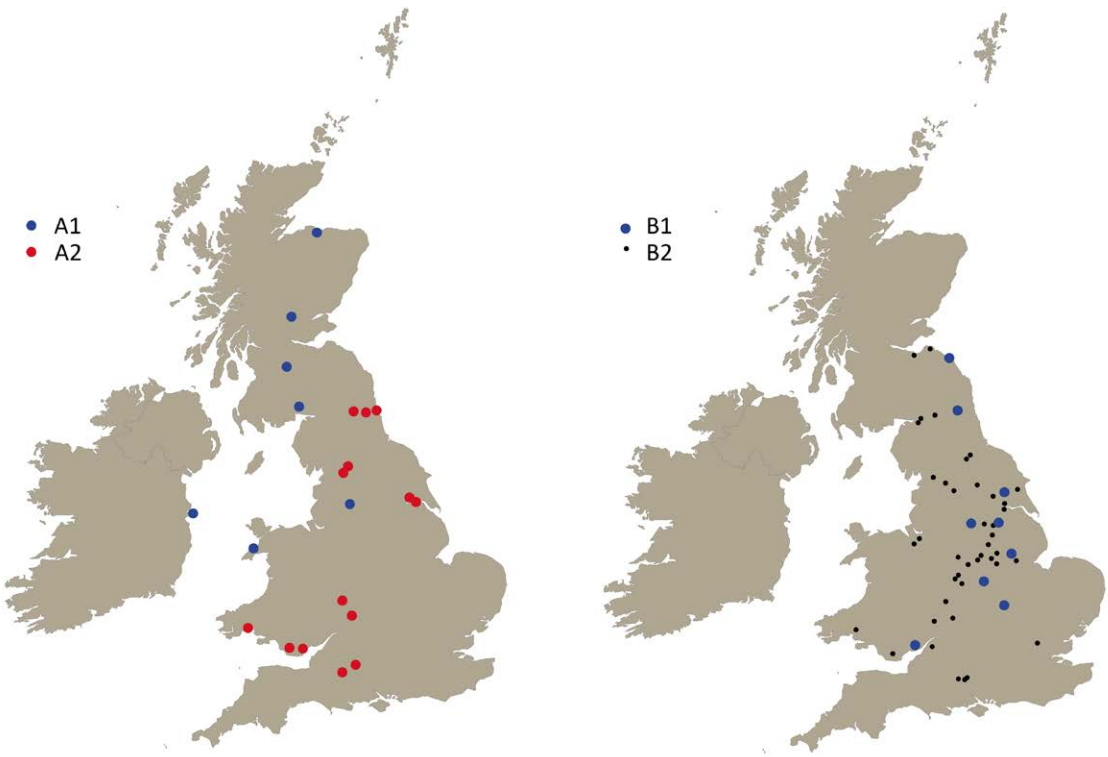


Figure 3. Distribution of beaded torcs. Left: type A. Right: type B


Figure 4. Ornately decorated beads on a type B2 torc, Harby, Nottinghamshire (PAS DENO-9850C7). © Portable Antiquities Scheme

remarkable consistency in construction and decoration (as illustrated in figure 2), and a rather diverse group of variants (B1) that often show technological links to type A. The core differentiation is by the nature of the junction between hoop and beaded portion.

All type B2 torcs have cylindrical socketed terminals on the beaded portion to take a tenon on the hoop; this is the reverse of the type A construction, where the bar carrying the individual beads most often slots into the hoop. A few type Bs show a type A tenon fixing, while a small number of both A and B torcs have rectangular terminals and slots on the beaded bar rather than the cylindrical fittings common on type B. Others have beads leading straight into the hoop (as on most intact examples of type A) rather than via an intermediate cylinder. All this diversity is classed here as type B1. The section of the hoop also varies (most commonly lozenge-shaped and more rarely circular), but too few are preserved to assess any systematic variation.

Two main bead types and a minor one can be identified (Figure 2), but these do not correlate with the B1/B2 division; instead, they seem to represent a difference in quality. The overwhelming majority are tripartite, comprising a central disc with stepped shoulders (or 'flankers'). Their decoration is rather formulaic and strictly linear. Most are either entirely plain (a8 of 37)[2] or have a plain central disc and flankers decorated with transverse incised lines (a2; 16 examples). The only other variant occurring more than once has circumferential grooves on the central disc, again with ribbed flankers (a3; four instances). A second category (c; a variant of the first) comprises simple discs lacking flankers. Only two instances are known; they are classed with type B1 as they show other variant features.

The final category, barrel-shaped beads (type b), shows markedly more variety. Of the nine known, eight bear quite striking decoration, and the beads are often large. For instance, one from Lamberton (Scottish Borders) has ribbed decoration, while one from Embsay (West Yorkshire) shows a wave pattern flanked by ribbing

[2] Three are too worn to identify in detail, and some of the apparently plain ones could have worn smooth.

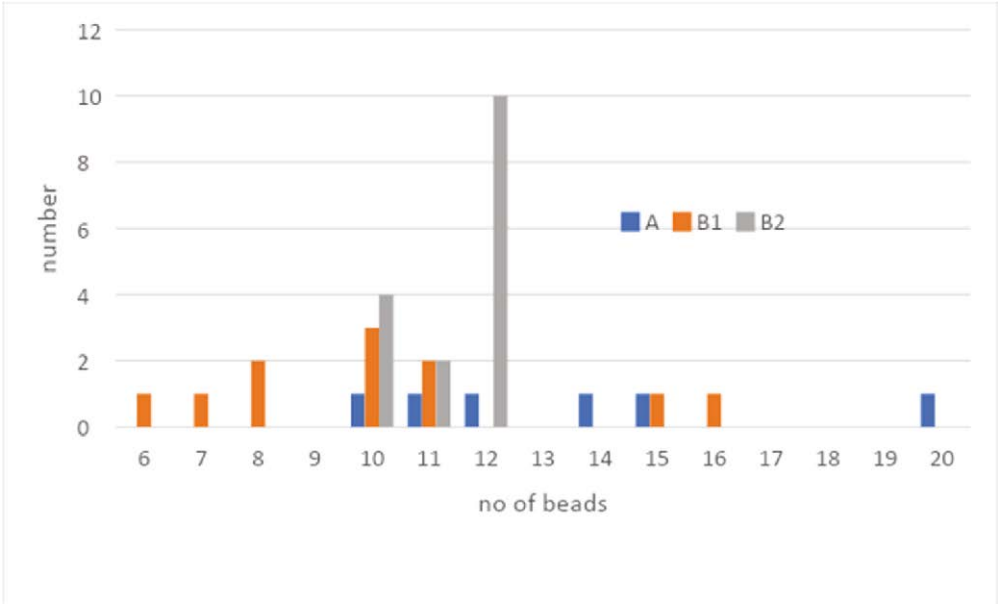


Figure 5. Numbers of beads on different styles of beaded torc

Figure 6. The burial with the converted beaded torc from Lathbury. © Albion Archaeology

Figure 7. The beaded torc portion and bracelet from the Lathbury burial. Photo by Adam Williams, © Albion Archaeology

Figure 8. The Lathbury bracelet. Photo by Adam Williams, © Albion Archaeology

(MacGregor 1976: nos 200, 203). Two metal-detecting finds show quite complex decoration: marginal lip motifs (reminiscent of the petalled designs on trumpet brooches) and, in one case, a central ribbed groove (Ecclesfield, S Yorkshire, and Harby, Notts; PAS SWYOR-DED02A and DENO-9850C7). These notably ornate torcs are reminiscent of the decoration lavished on certain type A torcs (Figure 4; e.g. MacGregor 1976: nos 202, 204–205). The diversity and decoration in this group suggests they were more individual and more bespoke than standard B2s with tripartite beads.

The discrimination between torc types is supported by differences in the numbers of beads (Figure 5). Type B2s have 10–12 beads (overwhelmingly 12), while type A torcs have between 10 and 20 beads. B1 shows a cluster between 6–11, but two have markedly larger numbers, both of which are variant in other ways: Caw Gap has an unusual terminal socket fitting straight into a bead, while the Rickerby Park, Stanwix torc has simple disc beads rather than tripartite ones (MacGregor 1976: no 208; Allason-Jones 1984).[3] It is included in type B1 as a variant despite its 'conventional' hoop junction.

The torcs gathered here under group B1 are diverse. Such variants from what became a dominant norm may well represent early stages in the development, and this is supported by crossover between technical aspects of types A and B. Available dating evidence, such as it is,

[3] Confirmed by personal inspection; the image in MacGregor 1976: no. 208 is not entirely clear.

supports type A being the earlier, with the two types then running concurrently (at least in use) through the second century (table 1). A development from A to B1 with shared features and then to 'standard' B2 seems plausible, though as yet unprovable.

## The Lathbury torc necklace

The recent discovery of a type B1 torc from Lathbury, Buckinghamshire, provides a rare excavated example that offers a case-study of their potential complexity. Excavations by Albion Archaeology at Northampton Rd, Lathbury in advance of quarrying in 2019 revealed three scattered Romano-British burials (two inhumations and one cremation) in the environs of a farm complex (Lyons 2020: 413, fig. 15; Barker *et al.* 2020; David Ingham, pers. comm.). One supine inhumation with legs slightly flexed, orientated with head to the south-east, wore a torc-twisted penannular bracelet on the right wrist and an unusual necklace (Figure 6). This comprised the beaded portion of a beaded torc, modified to be suspended from a double loop-in-loop chain (Figure 7). The weight of the beads caused it to slump to the right during burial; the chain was fragmentary as it survived, but the necklace was clearly around the neck when the individual was buried. The body was too poorly preserved to be sexed, but associations of such bracelets are overwhelmingly female.

Lathbury sits beyond the main distribution of beaded torcs and is only the second example known from a burial (the other being Lambay Island, Co. Dublin; Rynne 1976). The beaded portion is not one of the standard types. While it has tripartite beads, the central portions are bolder and more convex than is typical, and there are only six beads, two of them defined by low-relief modelling on the terminal cylinders. Surface X-ray fluorescence analysis by Lore Troalen showed that it was bronze with a tinned surface. Too few other examples have been analysed to contextualise the use of bronze rather than brass, though the latter is attested for a type B2 from Wishaw Hall, Warwickshire (Hunter 2008) and is suggested from the appearance of several others. More valuable is the evidence for surface treatment of the Lathbury beads, involving technological expenditure in tinning them. This is paralleled on a type A bead from Binn Hill, Moray (Hunter 2006: 153, ill. 18a) and a type B1 from Amesbury, Wiltshire (Hinds 2009: 339 no. 5), while type A beads from Tre'r Ceiri, Caernarfon, were gilt (Hughes 1907: 40–42). Again, this can be interpreted as an early stage of development when more effort was invested in individualised decoration compared to the later standardised form.

Interestingly, the other grave good was a torc-like bracelet, also old when buried; one terminal had been lost, with the bracelet bent to close the resulting gap (Figures 7–8). The surviving part-broken terminal preserves remains of a perforation, suggesting a hook-and-eye fitting. Hilary Cool (2010, 297) included these in her Group 4A; whereas penannular torc-twisted bracelets were long-lived, the suggestion of a hook-and-eye fastening puts this into the late third or fourth century on her contextual evidence. The evidence of wear and reuse suggests burial in the course of the fourth century, by which time the beaded torc portion was an antique, some 200-300 years old. It shows heavy wear, with the tinning worn off in areas close to the body and the relief mouldings worn away in places. It had also been modified, with the original hoop replaced by a brass double-loop-in-loop chain. Holes were carefully made in the terminals to fix it. One held a copper-alloy rivet to fasten one end of the chain permanently. The other hole was empty, suggesting a less permanent fixing, perhaps of an organic material that would allow removal.

## Decorative traditions: linear ornament and Celtic art

The main thing that links types A and B is the geometric simplicity of the decoration, restricted to repetitive linear motifs. Although they carried the idea of the Iron Age torc into Roman Britain, the decorative styles are very different from typical La Tène metalwork (in contrast to hinged collars). There are two exceptions. One is the well-known type A torc from Lochar Moss, with its openwork broken-back scroll riveted to the hoop (MacGregor 1976: no. 204). The other is a recent discovery of a type B torc from the Hull area. It was obscured by iron-rich corrosion and offered for sale among a box of nondescript post-Medieval finds, where it was spotted and purchased by Alistair McPherson, a Moray-based detectorist who has worked closely


Figure 9. The decorated beaded torc from the Hull area. Photo by Neil McLean, © National Museums Scotland

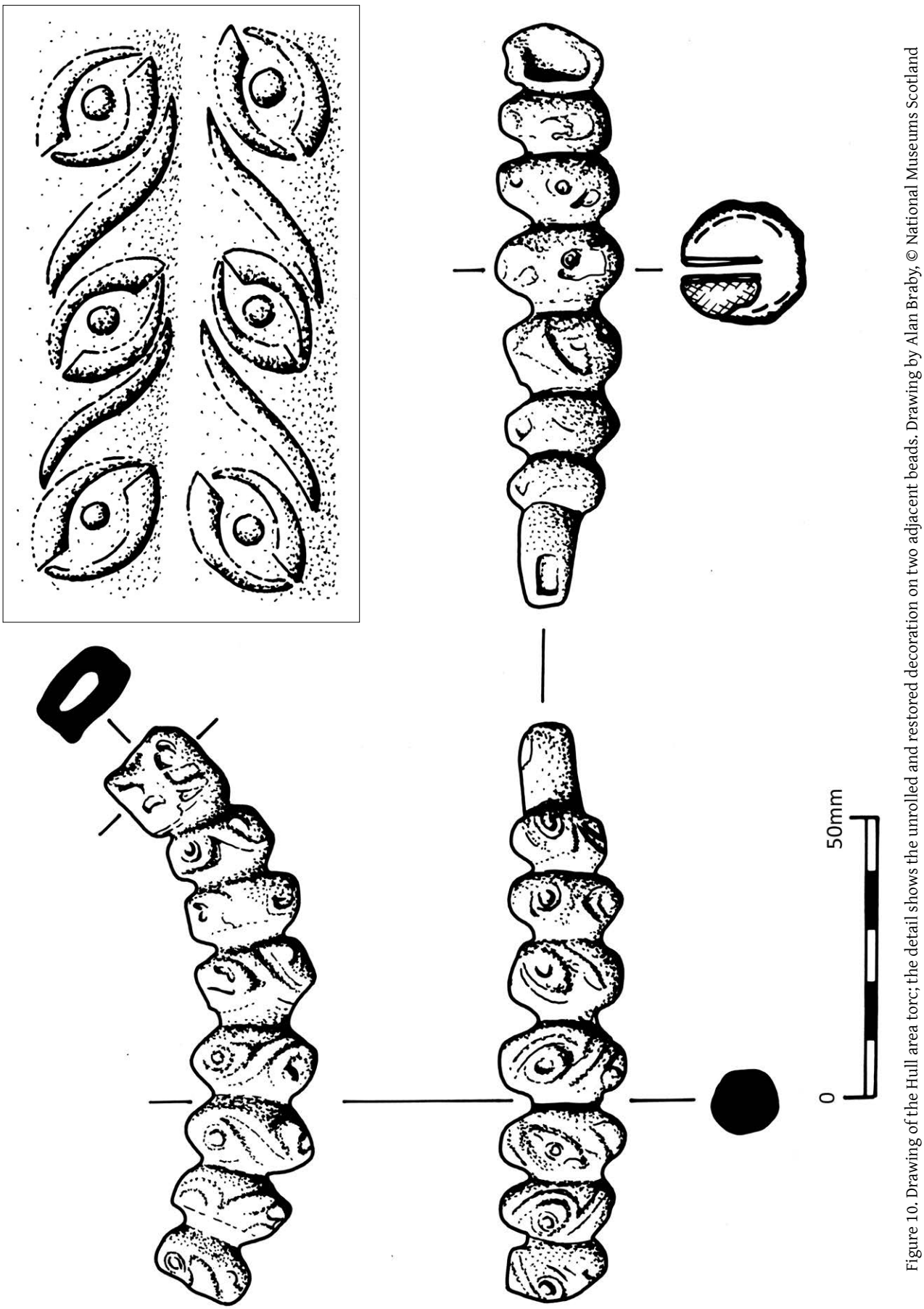


Figure 10. Drawing of the Hull area torc; the detail shows the unrolled and restored decoration on two adjacent beads. Drawing by Alan Braby. © National Museums Scotland


Figure 11. Distribution of metal-detected and other finds of beaded torcs

Table 1. Beaded torc finds with reasonable dating evidence, in approximate chronological order

| Findspot | Type | Dating evidence | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lambay Island | A1 | Brooches indicate a mid-C1st date (*c.* 40–75) | Rynne 1976 |
| Hyndford | A1 | No post-Flavian material from the site | MacGregor 1976: no. 202 |
| Stanwix, Rickerby Park | B1 | *c.* 75–120 | MacGregor 1976: no. 208 |
| Chester, Delamere St | B2 | *c.* 70–120 | Cool 2012: 94–7, fig 2.28, cat 11; for the dating, Cuttler *et al.* 2012, 20 |
| Rocester | B2 | *c.* 95–130 | R. White, pers. comm. |
| Lamberton Moor | B1 | Associated with late C1–C2 brooches | MacGregor 1976: no. 203 |
| Benwell | A2 | Location suggests Hadrianic or later | MacGregor 1976: no. 198 |
| South Shields | A2 | Antonine | Croom 1998 |
| Inveresk | B2 | Early Antonine (*c.* 140–165) | Bishop 2004: 152, fig. 100.3 |
| Corbridge | A2 | Late Antonine | Croom 1998: 62 |
| Carmarthen | B2 | Late C2nd context | Webster 2003: 322–323, fig. 8.6, no. 77 |
| Coygan Camp | A2 | RB phase is late C3rd | Wainwright 1967: 91, fig. 23.7 |

with the writer and other archaeologists. Its original findspot was not recorded as its significance was not realised when it was found.

***The Hull area torc*** *(Figures 9–10)*

Somewhat over half of the beaded portion is preserved, with a rectangular terminal slotted (10.5 x 4mm) to take a tenon from the hoop. Graduation of the seven surviving beads allows either eight or nine beads to be reconstructed; the former is more plausible as the decoration is paired, with the design mirrored on adjacent beads.[4] Each bead is decorated with a running motif of trumpet-defined teardrops around a central boss, with a narrow lentoid ridge joining it to the adjacent motifs. Three such motifs are present on each bead; there may originally have been four, but the tops are so worn that no certain trace survives here. The combination of wear and corrosion obscures some details, but slight asymmetries in the oval designs indicate they were modelled as two trumpet-headed motifs in rotational symmetry around the central boss. These are standard motifs within the so-called 'boss style' (e.g. MacGregor 1976: fig. 8 nos 1–4). The terminal is very worn, but preserves traces of a swash-N motif, again common in the art traditions of central Britain (e.g. MacGregor 1976: 28–29).

This was a complex casting given the amount of decoration. Slight dimples on the upper surfaces of at least two beads suggest there were individual feeder jets to each bead, but this was only partly successful. Four of the seven beads show substantial casting flaws that probably led ultimately to its fracture. However, it is likely that the flaws only became obvious as the top surface wore down in use. This is suggested by the very expedient attempts at repair, which show no real technical skill: in the case where a repair survives, it consists of a rolled sheet cylinder pushed into the hole, presumably to retain some organic material used to pack it out. The torc is 104.3mm in length, and weighs 158.52g. Surface X-ray fluorescence analysis characterised the alloy as a leaded bronze with minor zinc.

This is the only torc decorated with the art styles typical of central Britain. With the benefit of hindsight, this should not be a surprise; recent metal-detecting finds have removed type B from a frontier context and pulled it into the civilian zone of Roman Britain.

**Distribution**

Type A is found in a thin scatter across much of Britain, with the two types representing broad regional groupings, a northern one (Scotland / Irish Sea) and a south-western one (south-west England, south Wales), with overlapping outliers. Type B1, which shares features with type A, has an almost entirely complementary distribution, focussed on eastern Britain from Berwickshire to the east Midlands with two examples towards the Severn. Types A1, A2 and B1 seem to be three regional traditions within the early development of the beaded torc style (Figure 3).

[4] Bead dimensions, from the terminal, H x W (mm): 19.8 x 17.8; 21.8 x 20.6; 21.2 x 20.8; 22.2 x 21.7; 23.6 x 22.4; 21 x 18.8; ? x 17.0. The width dimensions reflect the original form most accurately; height is affected by both casting flaws and wear.

Metal-detecting has made a substantial difference to the understanding of beaded torcs (Figure 11). Recent PAS discoveries have shown that the distribution of type B2, the standard Romano-British form, is strongly focussed in the central Midlands, predominantly in the zone from Humber to Severn: several examples occur further north in central Britain, but it is not a central British type. This is quite a departure from previous scholarship. When MacGregor (1976: 97) wrote, 'all but three of the 16 known beaded torcs come from an area defined, on the south, by a line from the Humber to the Mersey; and, on the north, from the Forth to the Clyde estuaries'; the current writer readily classified them with central British metalwork. Yet there should have been pause for thought. Only two examples are known from Scotland, one from a Roman fort, the other from a hoard mostly of Roman material. In contrast to the wealth of examples recorded by the PAS, none have come through the Scottish Treasure Trove system. These are exceptional finds north of Hadrian's Wall. They are also much more common in the Midlands than in northern England; indeed, the weight of their distribution is complementary to that of boss-style, the main 'Celtic' tradition in central Britain (Hunter 2019: fig. 77). This is confirmed by their decoration: only the single example from near Hull is known with boss-style decoration, or indeed with anything that could be seen as La Tène-derived ornament.

The dating evidence remains poor, beyond giving type A earlier origins than type B (table 1). The evidence of technological sharing and the distribution suggest a sequence from type A to type B1, which then developed in the same area into the dominant B2; the use of all three clearly overlapped. They also overlap with hinged torcs more than has been realised: South Wales sees hinged torcs, type A, B1 and B2; hinged torcs often included beaded motifs in their decoration; and there are rare hybrids between the different types such as Dinnington (Beswick *et al.* 1990).

**Discussion: beaded torcs and regional ornamental traditions in and beyond Roman Britain**

The ongoing accumulation of metal-detected finds has substantially changed our view of beaded torcs. It has pulled the distribution of the main type into the civilian zone of Roman Britain, while increasing numbers of finds suggest a development trajectory A → B1 → B2. There is considerable overlap in their chronologies, and types A1, A2 and B1 reflect three different and broadly contemporary regional patterns of torc manufacture, with what came to be the dominant B2 type developing out of B1 broadly in the Midlands.

Michael Marshall (2021) has recently offered a considered discussion around possible meanings of torcs in Roman Britain, and I shall not go over the same ground here. We can instead focus on selected elements of beaded torcs and their implications. A key one is that such torcs now have no real association with the military zone; they developed in what became the civilian zone. The origins of these different Romano-British torcs seemingly lie in the first phase of contact, but they persisted into the early civilian phase once the army moved north. The Wraxall type is not well dated, but beaded torcs certainly continued through the second century, long after Baldock torcs had fallen from currency.

Who wore such torcs? Associations are sparse, but the burial evidence for Baldock torcs suggests they were female (Marshall 2021, 333, table 1 nos 1, 9, 10); at least one of the Wraxall collars, from Boverton, is likely to be from the burial of a woman; and Lathbury is most likely a female burial, although as the torc has been remodelled this does not demonstrate its primary associations.[5] One hesitates to be dogmatic, but there are hints of a pattern. As Marshall has discussed (2021: 336), if these were predominantly female ornaments then they fit into a broader picture in the provinces whereby women often maintained aspects of local dress while male costume and ornament began to follow more traditionally Roman forms.

But were torcs still seen as a local form? They had been exceptional, high-value items in the pre-Roman Iron Age, predominantly of gold, and had seemingly been falling from use; Farley & Joy (2024, 597-601) see the mass deposition of torcs, most prominently at Snettisham, as reflecting a social shift away from torcs in the earlier first century BC. Was there still a torc tradition in Britain by the time of the Roman conquest? There have been attempts to link torcs to Roman military honours instead (e.g. Simpson and Richmond 1941: 23–25), but Istenič and Ragolič (2023) have convincingly shown from representational evidence that torcs acquired as battle honours were worn in pairs on the chest, not around the neck. These military torcs, represented mostly on imperial-period depictions, took their inspiration from Iron Age male jewellery encountered by the armies of the mid and late Republic, so this was a long and durable memory. Given this, there is no reason to doubt that the idea of the torc could have lived on in Iron Age Britain as a culturally-significant status symbol or powerful item that was fit to be revived in the changing world of conquest.[6] It could offer an echo of earlier times rendered in a more

[5] The Harper Rd, London burial has recently been demonstrated to be female (Redfern *et al.* 2023). The associations of the Lambay Island torc, also from a burial, are opaque.

[6] The representation of a torc on a silver minim struck for Verica (Cottam *et al.* 2010: 75 no. 1310) in the Sussex area in the early first century AD demonstrates a continuing concept of torcs as significant items.

widespread material. Its form need not be seen as overt resistance to Roman rule, as torcs had a Roman currency too, albeit a different one; instead, it carried older traditions into a new world. The investment to make the more complex type A torcs and the more ornate type Bs (with more decorative beads and occasional tinning and enamelling) suggests these were still restricted items, but the quantities of standard type B2 suggests these were much more socially accessible. This carries echoes of the trajectory of torcs in south-east England, with a move to simpler, lighter forms (thanks to Michael Marshall for this suggestion; see Marshall 2021, 339).

Finds from military sites add to the picture. They were discounted in considering distributions to clarify patterns as they stand out as exceptions to broader trends. While type A1 torcs are found around the northern frontier and A2 ones in Wales, finds associated with military sites are typically non-local torc forms. The three type A torcs from the Hadrian's Wall zone (Benwell, South Shields and Corbridge) are all the non-northern A2 type. There are also four type B2 torcs from the northern military zone, again beyond their core distribution: Caw Gap, Stanwix, Inveresk and Chester. Additionally, three type Bs come from urban sites in southern Wales and northern England (Carmarthen, Caerwent, and Carlisle). It seems clear that A2 and B2 were brought into the northern frontier by the members of the military community. While A2 torcs are found in Wales, B2 are otherwise rare, suggesting these too were introduced. If they can indeed be seen as predominantly female ornaments, it may indicate the source of some of the people in the military community following the soldiers.

This shifting southwards of beaded torcs leaves a near-total absence of torcs in central and northern Britain in the Roman Iron Age. It is not absolute – for instance, there is a highly unusual Snettisham-type torc in copper alloy from Auldearn, near Nairn on the Moray Firth, dated as Roman Iron Age from the use of zinc in the alloy (*Discovery and Excavation in Scotland* 2014: 97), which shows participation in wider styles. But there was no attempt to continue or reinvent this form at the time of conquest, in contrast to the south.[7] Instead, there was innovation in ornament beyond the frontier. The north-east of Scotland saw the rise of the so-called massive tradition of distinctively local arm ornaments, which can be seen as a counter-reaction to Rome (Hunter 2014; 2019: 87–123). But the other notable feature is the widespread yet selective adoption of Roman brooches across the area. This has been discussed elsewhere (Hunter 2013), and shows clear selection in two directions: using Romano-British brooch types that resonated with local artistic motifs (such as trumpet brooches); and choosing unusual and exotic brooches.

The social shift that this widespread use of brooches represented has been underestimated. The north of Britain was not a brooch-using culture in the Iron Age. Sophie Adams' work on early and middle La Tène brooches showed that beyond east Yorkshire they were sparse indeed (Adams 2014); even in the latest Iron Age when brooches became commonplace in south-eastern Britain, they remained markedly less common in Yorkshire and near-absent further north and west.[8] This was a world where pins, not brooches, fastened clothing. Yet from the earliest contacts, Roman brooches became sought-after items – among the earliest Roman imports from the north are pre-Flavian brooches (Hunter 2023), and brooches are the commonest import good after samian ware in terms of the number of findspots. There is very little evidence to indicate who was wearing them, but they seem to have been widespread. Two brooches are known in weapons burials which might indicate male use,[9] while the hoard from Lamberton Moor contained a beaded torc, a pair of headstud brooches and a dragonesque brooch, an assemblage that suggests a female association at least in Roman terms (Anderson 1905).

This reveals an interesting contrast between social approaches in different areas. Torcs were reinvented in southern and central Britain in different regional styles in the changed world of conquest to evoke older traditions, and persisted for some time as a new civilian world emerged. In contrast, in what remained a military zone type B torcs are almost exclusively from military contexts. Instead, in a world that saw ongoing moments of conflict, people in Iron Age-style rural settlements were choosing Roman or (more often) Romano-British brooch styles, a distinctively Roman tradition but carefully selected either to resonate with local ornamental habits or local enthusiasm for flashy jewellery. The boom of 'Celtic art' around the time of conquest can be seen as an act of resistance and a strong cultural statement (Garrow 2008: 30–33; Hunter 2015: 130–131), but there was also an adoption and adaptation process that could include quite subtly different decisions over specific brooch types or ornaments to wear (e.g. Hunter 2010: 101; more generally, Davis and Gwilt 2008).

[7] Although Stuart Piggott's suggestion that massive armlets in north-east Scotland were inspired by Snettisham-style torcs (1959, 31), which had seemed very unlikely, perhaps gains a fraction more credence from the Auldearn find.

[8] PAS data on Iron Age brooches grouped by broad region, from a sample of 4024 brooches, gives the following percentages for England and Wales: south-east 46.8%; south 24.6%; Midlands 13.6%; south-west 8.9%; north 4.2%; west 1.9% (data checked 12.1.24)

[9] Burials from Merlsford (Fife) and Goshen (Stirling); Hunter 2005: 64–65.

While this analysis pulls beaded torcs away from military communities (one of our honorand's study areas), and makes them less Iron Age (carefully avoiding the term 'Celtic'; James 1999), it serves to make them rather more complex and informative on interactions between Iron Age communities and the shifting sands of the new Roman world. It also brings them into the Midlands, the land that has been Simon's adopted home for many years. I hope it provides some food for thought around objects that lived between two worlds.

**Acknowledgements**

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## Appendix: beaded torcs

Table 2 pulls together all beaded torcs known to the writer. One item has been removed from previous lists: an enamelled bead I previously linked to type A, from Culbin Sands, Moray (Hunter 2006: 153–154, ill. 18b). This has no parallels firmly associated with torcs, and now seems more likely to be a separate bead. There are other interesting decorated beads of Iron Age date or character, often enamelled, which have not yet seen detailed study (eg PAS YORYM-74D428, from Cherry Burton, East Yorkshire; a large bead with red enamel in its finely-ribbed exterior).

The following finds identified as beaded torcs (certainly or possibly) on the PAS database are not considered by this writer to be such: BERK-BF3445; BERK-0CE905; BUC-56106C; GLO-1E2BC9; LANCUM-C65AB5; LANCUM-4C22E6; LANCUM-DC3557; LEIC-544574; LON-75CFA2; LVPL-4575A8; NLM-145AA3; NLM-780507; SOM-88E8DD; SUR-FC3EA8; WILT-FAA8C3; YORYM-9B2056; YORYM-74D428. The example from Sully, Glamorgan (NMGWPA:99.34.6) which has also been noted as an example (Gwilt 2006: 313) seems more likely to be a section from a hinged bracelet.

Table 2. Beaded torcs, by type and findspot. Bead numbers recorded only for those complete or near-complete. Abbreviations: IA Iron Age, RIA Roman Iron Age, RB Romano-British, m/d metal-detected find. Bead types correlate with fig. 2. Junction type between beaded portion and hoop: 1 tenon on beaded portion; 2 conical mortice on beaded portion; 3 rectangular mortice; 4 variant

| Type | Site | Site/ discovery | Bead no/type | | Junction | Date | Notes | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | Ardunie, Perth & Kinross | m/d | | A1 | | | | TT 34/15; DES 2015: 148 |
| A1 | Binn Hill, Moray | m/d | | A1 | | | tinned | Hunter 2006:153, ill. 18a |
| A1 | Hyndford, Lanarkshire | RIA site | 12 | A1 | 1 | Flavian? | | MacGregor 1976: no. 202; Jope 2000: 294, pl. 261c |
| A1 | Lambay Island, Co. Dublin | burial IA | 10 | A1 | 1 | C1 | | Raftery 1983: no. 455; Jope 2000: 294 pl. 261b |
| A1 | Lochar Moss, Dumfriesshire | hoard | 15? | A1 | 1 | | | MacGregor 1976: no. 204; Jope 2000, 294, pl. 261a |
| A1 | Mow Road, Rochdale, Lancs. | hoard | 11 | A1 | 1 | | | MacGregor 1976: no. 205; Jope 2000: 293, pl. 259b |
| A1 | Tre'r Ceiri, Caernarfon | IA fort | | A1 | | | gilt | Hughes 1907: 40-42 |
| A2 | Barton-upon-Humber, Lincs. | m/d | | A2 | | | | PAS SWYOR-6F2F5E |
| A2 | Benwell, Northumberland | R fort | c.14 | A2 | 1 | 120+ | | MacGregor 1976: no. 198 |
| A2 | Brantingham, E. Yorks. | m/d | | A2 | | | | PAS YORYM-B9EC9D |
| A2 | Corbridge, Northumberland | R fort/town | | A2 | | 160–200 | | Croom 1998: 62 |
| A2 | Coygan Camp, Carmarthen | RB enclosure | | A2 | | L C3 | | Wainwright 1967: 91, fig. 23 no. 7; Jope 2000: 293, pl. 259e |
| A2 | Craven area, N. Yorks. | m/d | | A2 | | | | PAS SWYOR-A1CB4D |
| A2 | Dinas Powys, Glamorgan | m/d | | A2 | | | | PAS NMGW-7FAC90 |
| A2 | Gotherington, Gloucs. | m/d | | A2 | | | | PAS GLO-EEB7E3 |
| A2 | Kingston Deverill, Wilts. | m/d | | A2 | | | | PAS PUBLIC-FBA25B |
| A2 | Llan-Maes, Glamorgan | m/d | | A2 | | | | PAS NMGW-1B5576 |
| A2 | Perdiswell, Worcs. | stray | 20 | A2 | 1 | | | Jope 2000: 293, pl. 259c |

| Type | Site | Site/ discovery | Bead no/type | | Junction | Date | Notes | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A2 | South Shields, Co. Durham | R fort | | A2 | | 120–160 | | Croom 1998 |
| A2 | Victoria Cave, Settle, W. Yorks. | RB cave | | A2 | | RB | | Roach Smith 1848: pl. 27, 3; Croom 1998 |
| A2 | Wilsford cum Lake, Wilts. | m/d | | A2 | | | | PAS WMID-CFB9F3 |
| B | Coniscliffe, Co. Durham | m/d; near Piercebridge | | a | | | | PAS DUR-0E60CC |
| B | Winteringham area, Lincs. | m/d | 9+ | ? | | | | PAS DENO-E44122 |
| B1 | Amesbury area, Wilts. | m/d | | b1 | 4 | | tinned | Hinds 2009: 339, 345 no. 5 (WILT-1BCB06, but not currently locatable on PAS) |
| B1 | Ancaster, Lincs. | m/d | 11 | c1 | 3 | | enamel | PAS NLM 7159 |
| B1 | Caerwent, Monmouth | RB town | 7 | ? | 1 | RB | | NMGWPA:99.96.1 |
| B1 | Caw Gap, Northumberland | R frontier | 15 | a2 | 4 | R | | Allason-Jones 1984 |
| B1 | Ecclesfield, S. Yorks. | m/d | 8+ | b2 | 1 | | | PAS SWYOR-DED02A |
| B1 | Everton, Notts. | m/d | 11 | a1 | 3 | | | PAS SWYOR-1740A7 |
| B1 | Great Whittington, Northumberland | m/d | 10 | a4 | 3 | | | PAS NCL-400142 |
| B1 | Hull area, E. Yorks. | m/d | 8 | b1 | 3 | | | this paper |
| B1 | Huncote, Leics. | m/d | 10 | a1 | 3 | | | PAS LEIC-DD6041 |
| B1 | Lamberton Moor, Berwicks. | hoard | 8 | b1 | 1 | L C1–C2 | | MacGregor 1976: no. 203; Jope 2000: 293, pl 258c |
| B1 | Lathbury, Bucks. | burial | 6 | a2 | 4 | RB | tinned | this paper |
| B1 | Pocklington, E. Yorks. | m/d | 10 | a1 | 3 | | | PAS DUR-B8DF64 |
| B1 | Rickerby Park, Stanwix, Cumberland | RB / R fort? | 16 | c2 | 2 | 70–120 | | MacGregor 1976: no. 208 |
| B2 | Adlingfleet, Lincs. | m/d | | a1 | 2 | | | PAS NLM4339 |
| B2 | Attermire Cave, Settle, W. Yorks. | RB cave | | a | 2 | | | MacGregor 1976: no. 197. =no. 201 |
| B2 | Babworth, Notts. | m/d | 11 | a2 | 2 | | | PAS SWYOR-E0B0B4 |
| B2 | Boscombe Down, Wilts. | m/d | | a2 | 2 | | | S. Worrell, pers. comm. |
| B2 | Boscombe Down, Wilts. | m/d | | b2 | 2 | | | S. Worrell, pers. comm. |
| B2 | Carlisle, Cumberland | R town | 10 | a4 | 2 | | | MacGregor 1976: no. 199; Jope 2000: 293, pl. 258d |
| B2 | Carmarthen, Carmarthen | R town | | a2 | 2 | late C2 | | Webster 2004: 322-3, fig. 8.6 no. 77 |
| B2 | Chester (Delamere St), Cheshire | R fortress | 9+ | a3 | 2 | 70–120 | | Cool 2012: 94-7, fig. 2.28, cat. 11 |
| B2 | Chigwell, Essex | m/d | 4+ | a2 | 2 | | | Major 1996: 308, fig. 6 no. 4 |
| B2 | Clay Mills, Burton-on-Trent, Staffs. | m/d | 12 | a4 | 2 | | | Leahy 1979: 52-4 |
| B2 | Dale Abbey, Derbyshire | m/d | 6+ | a | 2 | | | PAS DENO-8911CA |
| B2 | Dumbleton, Gloucs. | m/d | | a1 | ? | | | PAS GLO-41CEA6 |
| B2 | Durnford, Wilts. | m/d | | a1 | 2 | | | PAS WILT-DAA276 |

| Type | Site | Site/ discovery | Bead no/type | | Junction | Date | Notes | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B2 | Dymock, Gloucs. | m/d | 8+ | a3 | 2 | | | PAS GLO-A17733 |
| B2 | Embsay, W. Yorks. | stray/hoard | 12 | b2 | 2 | L C1–C2? | | MacGregor 1976: no. 200 |
| B2 | Folkingham, Lincs. | m/d | ? | a1 | 2 | | | PAS LIN-65A032 |
| B2 | Harby, Notts. | m/d | 5+ | b2 | 2 | | | PAS DENO-9850C7 |
| B2 | Harrogate area, N. Yorks. | m/d | 12 | a2 | 2 | | | PAS SWYOR-3D2a71 |
| B2 | Ingleton, N. Yorks. | m/d | | ? | | | | PAS LANCUM-CEFF7E |
| B2 | Inveresk, E. Lothian | R fort | 11 | a1 | 2 | 140–165 | | Bishop 2004: 152, fig. 100 no. 3 |
| B2 | Lincolnshire | stray | 10 | a1 | 2 | | | BM 1984,0704.1 |
| B2 | Mansfield, Notts. | m/d | 12? | a2 | 2 | | | PAS DENO-304F42 / 306A31 |
| B2 | Margidunum, Notts. | R town? | 12 | a2 | 2 | | | Nottingham University Museum |
| B2 | Margidunum, Notts. | R town? | 12 | a2 | 2 | | | Nottingham University Museum |
| B2 | Misterton, Notts. | m/d | | b | | | | PAS SWYOR-B392E1 |
| B2 | Moulton, N. Yorks. | m/d | | a | | | | PAS NCL-79F3C6 |
| B2 | New Mains, Whitekirk, E. Lothian | hoard | 12 | a2 | 2 | L C1–C2 | | MacGregor 1976: no. 206 |
| B2 | Ockbrook, Derbyshire | m/d | 10 | a2 | 2 | | | PAS DENO-B0A936 |
| B2 | Rocester, Staffs. | R fort | 12 | a1 | 2 | 95–130 | | R. White, pers. comm. |
| B2 | Rossett, Clwyd | m/d | | a3 | 2 | | | PAS WREX-83568A |
| B2 | Shenstone, Staffs. | m/d | | a2 | 2 | | | PAS WMID-AB7FF1 |
| B2 | Skerne, E. Yorks. | hoard? | 10 | b2 | 2 | RB | | MacGregor 1976: no 207 |
| B2 | Stalling Down, Glamorgan | m/d | 9+ | a | 2 | | | A. Gwilt, pers. comm. |
| B2 | Tytherington, Gloucs. | m/d | | a2 | | | | PAS GLO-8E6F23 |
| B2 | Unprovenanced | m/d | 12 | a2 | 2 | | | Mills 1995: 18-19 |
| B2 | Wadworth, S. Yorks. | m/d | | a3 | 2 | | | PAS SWYOR-D24682 |
| B2 | Wall, Lichfield, Staffs. | m/d | | a2 | | | | PAS WMID5241 |
| B2 | Wishaw Hall, Warwicks. | RB site | 12 | a | 2 | | | Hunter 2008 |

# Expressions of Cultural Affiliation Reflecting the Dynamic Creation of Roman Auxiliary Communities

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**Introduction**

Roman military studies have historically focused on the large monolithic group of the army and its corporate identity. Like many other subfields, however, military studies have also gained an appreciation for individual and personal identity in antiquity, and in turn, how this identity was expressed and maintained (Allason-Jones 1999, 2001; Brennan 1998; Díaz-Andreu *et al.* 2005; Gardner 2007; Greene and Birley 2024; Hope 2001; Jones 1997; Laurence and Berry 1998; Mattingly 2014; Pitts 2007, 2008). Not surprisingly, Simon James has fruitfully considered both perspectives and has helped push forward in critical ways our understanding of the multifaceted Roman army and its role in the ancient world. When using the Roman army as a case study, it is the multiethnic auxiliary units of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD that allow the most interesting discussions about movement and cultural shifts in a growing empire (Haynes 2013). Through the material culture of auxiliary units we can hypothesize how objects of dress, religious expression, and daily habits were used to maintain, clash, or supersede various aspects of self-identity (Hales and Hodos 2010; Hodder 2012; Hodos 2015; Pearce 2002; Pitts 2010; Pitts and Versluys 2021; Van Alten 2017; Versluys 2017). This multidimensional and complex structure of outward expressions humbles the modern scholar when attempting to understand personal identity in the past and how we reconstruct it today. A quick consideration of the multitude of objects in our own daily lives that express a host of meanings—or, for that matter, no meaning at all—reminds us how difficult the task is to understand these symbols nearly two thousand years after their intended use.

A useful way to shift our approach to the materiality of identity focuses on deleting the dichotomy between continuity and change, and to reconfigure our conception of these actions not as strict binaries, but as part of a multitude of potential responses to shifting environments. Scholars have taken admirable leaps forward in this regard with assertions that we move beyond the tendency to categorize material culture either as representing the physical manifestation of the continuity of one's past identity, or its opposite, the process of change as a person encounters new situations (Ghisleni 2018; Jiménez 2008). Instead, a more fruitful approach considers entirely new ways of being and expressing oneself through material markers. Simon James tackled this subject admirably in a consideration of the 'Romanness' of soldiers, showing the strong influence of provincial soldiers on military institutions and accoutrement, at the very same time that the armies staunchly displayed themselves as Romans (James 2014: 95-7). But perhaps the most useful reminder, and one to evoke when considering the material culture of the Roman armies, is that the single trait that remained consistent through the entirety of Rome's existence was the willingness to borrow from others and make anything Roman, especially in military pursuits (James 2014: 102-3). This notion reminds us that what is 'Roman' in any context is up for debate.

The new vibrant space of a Roman auxiliary fort is a fruitful place to investigate these dynamic practices and further our understanding of shifting groups and environments in the Roman world. A simple example of the varied processes of cultural change, and indeed the multiple ways the material markers might be analysed, can be found in the ceramic assemblages of auxiliary forts. On their face, the use of different ceramics appears to characterise choices representing either continuity or change. Past discussions focus on two models for the use of different ceramic types in a household; traditional forms may have been used in public areas to advertise continuity of social practice amongst a displaced group (van Driel-Murray 2009: 816-20; 2012), or they may appear in private areas of a home, generally in food preparation spaces, to continue traditional habits. Conversely, newly adopted forms of tableware may have been chosen by those households who stood to benefit from advertising important associations in a new environment (Okun 1989, 136; Greene and Birley 2024). Rather than evaluate this evidence with only two options of change or continuity, a dynamic and developing approach is favoured. In this new context both actions, even choices that seem to represent traditionalism, show adaptation to shifting social situations and represent something new in a novel environment. The retention of habits that seem to evoke tradition had new value and meaning in the novel context of the auxiliary regiment.

The material culture of the Roman *auxilia* may help to find daily commemorations of identities and allow us to hypothesize how these emblems functioned in

the new environment of a military fort. Our challenge is interpreting this evidence and its meaning in the daily routine of antiquity. Only a small amount of the evidence available to understand the decisions made by individual soldiers can be discussed here. I will also consider the personal relationships soldiers maintained while in the Roman army, such as the family bonds they preserved while in the military environment. I hope to further illuminate the heterogenous and dynamic culture of the Roman *auxilia* and explore the combination of old and new ideas in this ever-shifting landscape of the Roman army.

## Methodologies and challenges

The study of identity among Roman auxiliary soldiers had traditionally begun from the standpoint that non-citizen auxiliary recruits became something new upon entering the army, usually with priority given to the newly formed identity of 'soldier' (Haynes 1993, 1999; James 1999, 2001). Analyses usually describe the fashioning of the auxiliary soldier's identity as closely connected to the corporate body of the cohort, with a character that specifically dominates over previous affiliations, such as one's original cultural membership. This new identity of 'soldier' spawned from inclusion in the auxiliary units and is commonly characterized as one strongly 'Roman' in its nature because of the manifest 'Romanness' of the army and its role in maintaining the empire and its frontiers. Outward symbols of *militaria*, such as weaponry or medallions, and other symbolic items of one's military status made this new identity visually explicit (Coulston 1988; James 1999; Nicolay 2007). Closely connected to this prioritization of one's military identity was the tendency for soldiers to create a group that can be identified as discreet and different from the rest of society by emphasizing the military unit as the chief identifier of its character (Greene 2012 for modern comparison). This has been termed in the past 'the community of soldiers' by James (1999) and has been explored in other ways, for instance as a 'total institution' that could thrive entirely with internal resources (MacMullen 1984; Pollard 1996).

Without doubt the identity of an auxiliary as a Roman soldier is not in question; but it is also unlikely that the identification as soldier was favoured at all times and in all places, or that it fully replaced one's previous cultural affiliation. Archaeological evidence betraying the preservation of original or non-Roman cultural membership is also distinct and fairly well represented in the material record (Ivleva 2011; Greene 2014). These outward expressions may have been maintained for the purpose of expressing an individual or unique character or to articulate some resistance to the complete transformation to Roman soldier, though it is difficult to differentiate motivations.

Borrowing from sociological approaches to identity can help to think through the process of cultural change and incorporation by individuals. Fredrik Barth (1969) showed long ago that boundaries between ethnic groups were not as rigid as once thought and that ethnic identity could be maintained even with intense cross-cultural contact. He showed that an individual voluntarily chose specific relevant markers to memorialize their ethnicity, especially in a situation that could compromise this aspect of their identity. Importantly, Barth noted that these markers would be expressed physically and continually to maintain one's cultural affiliations (Barth 1969: 9-12; Lucy 2005: 96-7).

We could determine that a soldier who continued his ethnic traditions may have wished to show his affiliation to a sub-group based on his cultural background, perhaps even more so at times when this aspect of identity was under pressure within a mixed population. Incorporation into a group of culturally mixed auxiliary soldiers, at the same time taking on a new identity within the Roman army, would certainly qualify as a point of identity stress. Precisely what emotions or motivations were at work when a soldier adhered to traditions or formed new habits may remain unknown to us, but certain forms of physical expression were more consistent with a pre-military identity of at least some auxiliary soldiers. Outward physical emblems could be used skilfully to formulate and express identity, especially to maintain a previous affiliation within a group that could be culturally mixed and stressed, such as the multiethnic auxiliary cohorts.

The personal connections upheld during their twenty-five years in the army suggest that soldiers maintained the most important cultural connections. We can find groups of ethnically similar soldiers making dedications together or creating smaller communities within the larger unit of the cohort indicating there was some affiliation between these soldiers (Haynes 2013: 227-236; Meyer 2013: 39-41; Meyer 2020). Different types of evidence indicate that an individual may have carried much of his cultural background into the military environment and maintained this in some way, such as through religious practice (Birley 2008a), while still adopting the trappings of a Roman soldier. This retention of cultural character could be achieved by maintaining strong personal relationships with his home community, perhaps by way of marriage to a woman with the same cultural background or with choices of his personal servants (Phang 2004; Speidel 1989). Military diplomas certainly suggest that a number of soldiers sought a wife with a similar ethnic background to himself. The documents preserving the *origo* of both partners show that soldiers more often 'married' women with the same ethnic origins, sometimes from families living within the military

community itself (Eck 2014: 46-50; Greene 2015). Whether because of emotional ties or convenience, this suggests that some strategies for maintaining cultural identity were deliberate and important for at least some soldiers.

Archaeologically we hope to find evidence of material symbols of differentiation, but identity was created and reaffirmed also by practice and behavioural means dictated by different situational constructions (Hill 2001: 12; Jones 1996: 70; Jones 1997: 60; Lucy 2005: 95). These categories are not entirely absent from the material record but are certainly more difficult to reconstruct today. Lucy (2005: 97) stresses the need to express ethnic affiliation through symbols, especially in material form, and that these symbols need to have held meaning prior to a shift in one's environment. Those same symbols must be understood in some way in the new environment to hold meaning as a cultural emblem. Therefore, we might look for the continuation of religious practices from the home region or adherence to certain dress types that operated as outward symbols of status or rank, or simply affiliation to a group. In the Roman army these symbols would have contended with those of the military hierarchy and status within it, but their difference from the Roman norm will have been the very feature that distinguished their presence in the material record. A dynamic approach to the use of such symbols allows both traditional and Roman objects to operate in novel ways as value and symbolism was created in a new environment.

Despite potential problems, the material culture of auxiliary soldiers stationed away from their homelands can be used cautiously as a case study to explore some of the issues discussed above. By nature of their situation, auxiliary soldiers were defined by change and adaptation, and there is no doubt that parts of soldiers' lives changed immediately upon enlistment, with at least one aspect of their identity becoming defined by their role in the Roman army (James 1999: 16-17; Haynes 1999). Simon James paints a vivid picture of the transformation experienced by an individual upon entrance into the cohorts 'as he acquired a new identity, or more accurately, changed some of his multiple existing identities, and perhaps acquired additional ones' (James 1999: 16; cf. James 2001: 82-4). He highlights the change of ceremony, language, grooming, foodways and dress to name only a few, which will have existed alongside original ethnic and social identities.

Artefact assemblages of the auxiliary forts on Hadrian's Wall certainly contain material that stood apart from the standard goods and objects that travelled through the trade routes opened by conquest that we often label 'Roman' (Greene and Birley 2024). Still, it may always be the case that ideas and goods were adopted and disseminated far from any connection with the culture from which they originally spawned. Nevertheless, from ceramic types to religious beliefs we identify archaeological artefacts with specific areas of the empire and their populations, while understanding these fluid boundaries. The worship of the *Veteres* has been found only around Hadrian's Wall and often in military contexts such as at Vindolanda, while Epona and the *matronae* are of Celtic origin found primarily in Gaul and Germany, as well as in Britain (Green 2003: 51-6; Irby-Massie 1999; Woolf 2003). These expressions to non-Roman deities found in auxiliary military contexts contrast the ubiquity of large altars to *Iupiter Optimus Maximus* in camps of the western provinces, suggesting a Roman religious counterpart was added to any retention of the original religion of the soldiers, at least notionally or officially.

**The material remains of auxiliary identity?**

It is clear from epigraphic evidence that the ethnic composition of a given unit was not straight forward, and soldiers in the same unit had different origins. An obvious public example is found on the Adamklissi monument in Romania (*CIL* III 14214), which records a unit with Gauls, Spaniards and British troops, as well as one each of an African, Norican, and Raetian soldier (Turner 2013). In Britain, three altars from Birrens (*RIB* 2100, 2107, 2108) recording three different ethnic groups in the *cohors* II *Tungrorum equitata* highlight the varied composition of units in Britain. The altars stress the difference between some smaller groups and the rest of the cohort and highlight their desire to express a distinction physically and publicly. They show solidarity amongst each smaller group by making a dedication together with others having similar cultural origins, which stood distinctly separate from those in the unit with other backgrounds (Haynes 2013: 227-36; Meyer 2013: 39-41; Meyer 2020). These separate acts may represent an attempt to maintain some group identity separate from that of the cohort and the military.

At Vindolanda an inscription advertises at least two corporate entities present at the fort in the third century, as well as a clear desire to make a distinction between these groups even at this late date. The inscription reads (Birley 2007, 2008b):

> CIVES GALLI
> DE GALLIAE
> CONCO[R]DES
> QVE BRITANNI
>
> cives Galli| de(ae) Galliae| conco[r]des|que Britanni
>
> 'The Gallic citizens to the goddess Gallia and, in agreement, the British (citizens)'

The presence and distinction of two populations reinforces that there was some desire to separate broad ethnic groups involved in making this dedication and we are reminded that, even if in some instances new soldiers were largely recruited from 'local' sources, this was not always the case, nor were practices the same everywhere (Haynes 2013: 121-34; cf. Holder 1980: 109-39). If local recruitment were a strict policy, we should not expect to see evidence of a substantial group of Gauls in the IV *Gallorum* when they resided at Vindolanda in the 3rd century (Birley 2007: 106). However, the emphasis in this stone of the different cultural groups suggests there was a significant population at Vindolanda that identified as Gauls, most likely serving in or attached to the unit stationed there. This group stood distinct from the Britons, who were perhaps the inferior partner considering their relegation to the bottom of the inscription in much smaller and sloppier lettering (c. 1.5cm letters compared to 4cm of the line naming the Gauls). That contrasting relationship, and possibly the hierarchy that existed on site, was made clear in the dedication (Birley 2008b: 171; Meyer, this volume). The joint dedication with the *Britanni* suggests that, at the very least, there was a blend of cultural affiliations in this military community, but also that still in the third century the desire to differentiate between broad ethnic categories was alive and well.

Auxiliary diplomas also suggest there was continued importance in differentiating cultural affiliation; each one identified the *origo* of the soldier (his place of origin), even after twenty-five years of military service, and often also the *origo* of his wife if she was named on the document. Whether or not this detail had an official purpose alone, it suggests that recognition of one's geographical or family origin was necessary and did not become obsolete information, even at the point citizenship was awarded (Mirković 2007; Speidel 2017). Perhaps it was the very nature of auxiliary groups as mixed cultural units that was the greatest stimulus for continued expressions of identity such as these. As mentioned above, Military diplomas show that a soldier's wife—*de facto* or otherwise—more often originated from the same cultural group as the soldier (Greene 2015). The deliberate decision to choose an individual from the original *tribus* with which to have this close personal relationship may be a good indication that there was a strong desire to maintain cultural affiliations from home. Rather than allow the role of Roman soldier to overshadow one's original cultural affiliation, it seems that many soldiers desired to maintain that cultural association, not only in their lifetime but also by giving a strong cultural connection to the next generation as well, a trend that can be explored in the naming practices of children listed on diplomas (Meyer and Greene 2024). It is also quite likely that women with the same cultural affiliation were the daughters and sisters of the soldiers present in the unit. If these were the common marriage partners for soldiers, this practice supports even further the notion that cultural or ethnic groups remained close within the otherwise mixed populations of the Roman *auxilia* (Wells 1997). Also a part of smaller groups within military communities were the servants and slaves brought into military service by soldiers (Linden-High 2020; Speidel 1989). Inscriptions record that soldiers and their servants often came from the same town or province, even when stationed very far from their original place of recruitment. These situations allow us to reconstruct military communities with discrete groups of individuals with similar cultural backgrounds making up the corporate whole. The relocation of a large part of the household, including a wife, servants, and perhaps even extended family such as parents or siblings, paints an intimate picture of military communities. The emerging image is not one in which soldiers were quick to leave behind their pre-service affiliations. Rather, in at least some cases we should imagine that the maintenance of ethnic bonds was achieved with the creation of culturally similar groups distinct from the larger community.

A writing tablet from Vindolanda emphasizes the presence of smaller ethnic groups within the larger corporate body of the cohort (*Tab.Vindol.* III 650. Bowman and Thomas 2003, 109-11; Greene 2013). An individual named Ascanius writes: 'Greet Verecunda and Sanctus, ..., Capito and all my fellow-countrymen and friends.' The military context is assured by the mention in line four of the *praefectus*, but the sender, Ascanius, is a *comes Augusti* indicating he was in a slightly higher social bracket (Bowman and Thomas 2003: 111). A woman Verecunda is mentioned by name, presumably in residence somewhere at Vindolanda. The inclusion of *omnes cives et amecos* suggests that Ascanius is not of Italian origin, but of some other ethnic group. Based on this assumption, the soldiers greeted by Ascanius were more likely to have been auxiliaries with non-Roman origins or were perhaps veterans that remained at Vindolanda. The tablet dates to the AD 90s when Vindolanda was occupied by Batavians and Tungrians, both of northern European origin (Birley 2002: 57-76). A group of soldiers and their families with the same cultural background—the *omnes cives* greeted in the tablet—were present at the fort and seem to have maintained close social ties. The fact that the woman Verecunda is named personally indicates a close relationship with Ascanius, perhaps even familial, but the common use of *frater* and *soror* as a familiar greeting to comrades and friends makes it difficult to determine actual blood relations (Kepartová 1986; Lendon 2006). At the least, there may have been a close cultural connection if she was included with the *omnes cives* that Ascanius greets. The latter scenario is

reminiscent of the conclusions drawn from the military diplomas that many of the *de facto* wives living in the military community are listed with the same *origo* as the soldier himself. The salutation to one's countrymen sounds very much like the rank and file in an auxiliary unit, rather than for instance, the prefect and other high-ranking officials in a cohort.

Other evidence from Vindolanda suggests cultural associations from 'home' were continued and manipulated in the new environment of the garrison, specifically with the continuation of religious practices. Epigraphic evidence from military sites in northern Britain exposes two types of religious dedication representing corporate and personal motivations. The familiar group dedication by the unit is most certainly official, with the altar placed in the middle of the *principia*, dedicated, not surprisingly, to *Iupiter Optimus Maximus*. This type of dedication need not indicate the 'Romanness' of the soldiers in the unit, but rather the fulfillment of state expectations by the cohort. It is by means of the more personal items that we might come to understand individual decisions in the religious sphere.

Private and personal choices often reveal adherence to a deity with an ethnic origin or specific cultural association. Private religious choices are more likely revealed by means of personal altars, small portable items that surely belonged to an individual or small family unit. These items are often dedicated to deities with Celtic or Germanic origins in the North of Britain; Moguntis, Magusanis, various forms of mother goddesses, and the ambiguous *Veteres* altars are abundant (Birley 2008a), while a recent altar found at Vindolanda and evidence from Carvoran (roughly seven miles west of Vindolanda on Hadrian's Wall) shows adherence to a Syrian deity (Birley 2012). Other material from Vindolanda indicates further adherence to original cultural origins among the *auxilia* present there. A small stone dating to the early 3rd century was carved with a male head in profile, wearing a pointed cap. This representation may have parallels in North Africa, but comparable evidence is limited. Whether this item reflects someone's choice based on original cultural background or a newly adopted practice cannot be known, but it is almost certain that it more readily fits into a category of material that is simply not what we imagine to be 'Roman' at this point in time. When a personal choice is made, soldiers often expressed themselves by affiliation with deities of their original cultural group or local forms of a divinity like the *Veteres*. Group affiliation with divinities associated with non-Roman ethnic origins also existed and was at least partially expressed by the erection of larger-scale altars, not only small personal ones. This action could create solidarity among a distinct ethnic group within the unit, as well as become a physical codification and public advertisement of that affiliation.

The stone from Vindolanda discussed above is the only known dedication to the *Dea Gallia*, and it appears to advertise a strong connection with the geographic location. Another dedication from Vindolanda records the only mention of a deity named Ahvardua, a female goddess otherwise unknown probably associated with the Tungrian homeland in northern Gaul (Birley, Birley, Stempel 2013). The stone was found at the top of a ditch of the Period IV fort, which was occupied by the *cohors* I *Tungrorum* (*ca*. AD 105-120), and the unit is named on its face under the dedication to the deity. The confluence of evidence that the stone was commissioned and erected by the unit of Tungrians and that the deity represented was a local goddess of northern Gallic origin, provides unique evidence that auxiliary soldiers often continued their original religious affiliations while in the military (Greene and Birley 2024). The size and quality of this stone, and the likelihood that the dedication was made on behalf of the majority of the unit, suggests a corporate adherence to the local deity rather than simply an individual's proclivity towards this goddess.

By inscribing the dedication on a stone altar, a soldier took part in a 'Roman' practice; but at the same time, the Roman habit was adopted for the very purpose of physically expressing a cultural affiliation not Roman in nature. Rather than focus on the Roman form of the dedication, we may just as easily emphasize the message that is projected: an adherence to habits associated with a cultural background that advertises one's identity that stands distinct from, or alongside, his role as Roman soldier. Within a mixed cultural unit this outward expression could serve to solidify association with a smaller group as part of a multi-faceted identity. The result is most easily described as a newly formed, hybrid identity, one which does not have a tidy label, and does not conform to notions of either continuity or change. The various aspects that create this hybridity have their own discrete origins and were used in different ways, and at different times, to express fluid and changing self-identification in a novel environment.

## Conclusions: degrees of difference

Memorializations of one's origins were certainly expressed materially and behaviourally in the maintenance and articulation of identity, but understanding the discrete decisions made by individuals can be difficult. In addition to the durability of stone inscriptions, which often provide evidence of religious affiliations, it is not surprising that retention and expression of traits from a soldier's homeland was focused on ritual and related phenomena that

generated social cohesion and reinforced a sense of group belonging. It is expected that a group would express cultural connections materially, especially at a point when the identity of that group was compromised. In the case of auxiliary soldiers, two obvious situations of potential identity loss are possible: either at the initial point of incorporation into the entirely Roman socio-political system of the military or if that situation also involved a mixture of recruits from different areas of the empire into one new social group. Surely, individual situations varied, and unique circumstances arose, but these moments of removal from one place and incorporation into another larger group in a foreign location must have been points of considerable identity stress.

The nature of Roman religion certainly allowed a level of acceptance of new or alternative forms of worship, so perhaps the retention of their original religious beliefs was also an easy aspect of ethnic identity to maintain publicly and privately. The willingness to conflate deities suggests that there was some flexibility and perhaps even desire to seek out new ways of expression. The amalgamation of the two systems looks more like James' discussion of a newly formed military identity (James 1999), one that incorporates traditionalism and novelty at once. We cannot ignore individual sacred expression in the form of personal altars, which are so often dedicated to Celtic or Germanic deities. These certainly represent a personal choice on the part of the worshipper and may indicate the retention of habits from the homeland within the dynamic space of a multiethnic auxiliary unit.

Roman auxiliary soldiers created a soldierly identity by layering newly adopted social symbols of the Roman army over cultural customs of their homelands. In much the same way that we now understand 'romanization' to have been a continual two-way process and a fluid concept, identity is also understood as a non-static, dichotomous creation that can shift depending on the context of its articulation. In certain cases, one aspect of a person's identity may have served as social or political cachet if there was value placed on that group, for instance membership in an ethnic unit with elite or singular military abilities such as the Batavians (van Driel-Murray 2003; Roymans 2004; van Rossum 2004). In other ways the retention of cultural customs from one's homeland can be seen as an individual choice that perhaps characterizes a person within a group or a smaller faction within a larger body such as a Roman military unit. Whatever the desired message or effect, material symbols were likely chosen deliberately by an auxiliary soldier, whether to consciously advertise or to subconsciously memorialize, in the creation of a new identity as Roman soldier. This paper is only a small piece of a much larger dialogue - one that Simon James has been a critical voice in for decades -about the movement of communities around a multiethnic empire. A deeper investigation of the individuals that comprised the auxiliary units and a greater understanding of the personal choices they made will produce a much more detailed understanding of these multiethnic communities.

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# Part 3

# Relativist Deconstructions of Imperial Culture

# Sculpture from Old Carlisle, Cumbria, and What It Tells Us about Life in the Hinterland of Hadrian's Wall

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Old Carlisle in Cumbria is not a well-known fort in the Military Zone, having been largely overlooked in favour of its more extensively explored neighbours at Maryport and on Hadrian's Wall. It lies about 200 metres north of the Roman road which runs from Carlisle (Lugavalium: 17 km. to the north) to Papcastle (Derventio: 22 km. to the south) on a bluff overlooking a bend of the Wiza Beck (NY 260464). Although recorded for many years on Ordnance Survey maps as Olenacum, it is now considered more likely to have been known as Maglona, possibly meaning 'high, outstanding place' or 'noble place' (Rivet and Smith 1979: 407, following *RIB* 899).

There is little to see of the fort itself due to the lack of excavation, but aerial photographs suggest it was a very small fort (1.82 hectares: 4.4 acres) considering it is known to have housed the *ala Augusta* in the late 2nd century CE (*RIB* 893; 894; 895; 905; 897; which can be dated to 188, 191, 197, 213 and 242 CE respectively). By the time of the *Notitia Dignatatum*, the unit at the fort was the *numerus Solensium* (*ND* XL.28), a unit named after the sun god Sol, a deity associated with the emperor Aurelian and his succeeding emperors from the late 3rd century (Reece 1980: 116).

What is known about the site mostly comes from the sculpture that has been found over the centuries. Many of the houses, barns and field walls in the area have Roman stones in their fabric, some of which are still in place whilst others were rescued as they were discovered and found their way into Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery in Carlisle; some, sadly, are now lost (Birley 1951). Work on this sculpture for the eleventh volume of the British fascicule of the *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani* supports the conclusions from the aerial photographs that this, although small scale, was a normal Roman fort - if there is such a thing – but with some rather unexpected elements in regard to its importance, its population and the religious beliefs practiced at the site (Allason-Jones 2023 = *CSIR* I.11).

**Religion**

There is evidence that a wide range of deities was worshipped at the fort and its associated *vicus.* The discovery of five late 2nd century CE dedications to Jupiter Best and Greatest may not be considered unusual for a fort in the Military Zone (*RIB* 893; 894; 896; 897; 898). Jupiter was, after all, the father of the gods and was considered the protective deity for the Roman Empire and the Roman army; across the empire, soldiers renewed their vows every January in ceremonies in honour of Jupiter, and civilians were encouraged to follow their lead (Henig 1984: 89). What is unusual at Old Carlisle is the lack of decoration on these altars, particularly when compared with the Jupiter altars from neighbouring Maryport (Haynes and Wilmott 2020). Only one of the altars dedicated to Jupiter at Old Carlisle has any decoration, the others being remarkably plain, even prosaic (*RIB* 896: *CSIR* I.11, no. 57). It was found in or shortly before 1755 about 200 metres east of the fort, already damaged by the 'marks of a pick all over it' (Smith 1755). It was almost immediately lost, then rediscovered temporarily in 1807 in a garden in Carlisle, only to be mislaid again, so can only be described from antiquarian illustrations. It was dedicated 'for the welfare of Lucius Septimius Severus and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, both Augusti', and can be dated to 198-211CE or, if Geta was Augustus, 208-211 CE.

One altar that was trimmed to a neat rectangular block after discovery, leaving only the inscribed shaft, was dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus by the men of the *ala Augustae* (*RIB* 895). This deity links the senior Roman deity with the Asian Thunder God and, as such, introduces an exotic eastern element to the Pantheon worshipped at Old Carlisle. However, it should be noted that there is epigraphic evidence for a temple to Jupiter Dolichenus at Old Penrith, the fort immediately to the south-east of Old Carlisle (*RIB* 916), which may imply there were a number of worshippers of this syncretised deity in the north west (see also the dedication by the First Aelian Cohort of Dacians at Birdoswald (*RIB* 1896) and the altar dedicated by a centurion of the Twentieth Legion Valeria Victrix at Great Chesters (*RIB* 1725)). Worshippers further east in the 3rd century would have found a Dolichenum at Vindolanda, with altars dedicated by prefects from the Fourth Cohort of Gauls and the Second Cohort of Nervians (Birley and Birley 2010).

On another altar Jupiter is linked with Vulcan (Figure 1: *RIB* 899; *CSIR* I.11, no. 66). Vulcan is not a common deity in Britain, but he is present on several other stones

Figure 1. Altar to Jupiter Best and Greatest and Vulkanus from Old Carlisle (*CSIR* I.11, no. 66).

in the Military Zone, two reliefs: one from Chester-le-Street in County Durham (*CSIR* I.11, no. 101) and one from Maryport in Cumbria (*CSIR* I.11, no. 102), as well as a four-sided block from Housesteads (*CSIR* I.6, no. 23) and an inscription to Vulcan on a possible altar shaft from Maryport (*RIB* 846). The Old Carlisle altar has somewhat poor lettering and only the sketchiest fashioning of the front of its capital and two bolsters, giving an unfinished appearance. It is the norm with altars in the region that they were first roughed out (possibly at the quarry), then the decoration applied, with the inscription being added later, often by a second hand (*CSIR* I.11, xliii-xliv); this altar appears to have had the inscription cut before any decoration was even considered. The text translates as 'To Jupiter Best and Greatest and to Vulkanus for the welfare of our Lord Marcus Antonius Gordianus Pius Felix Augustus, the masters of the villagers dedicated this altar from money contributed by the villagers' (*RIB* 899). It might be questioned whether these villagers contributed enthusiastically or even voluntarily, given the poor quality of the carving of the inscription and unfinished nature of the limited decoration, which both suggest a well-trained professional hand was missing in the production. The use of the Latin word *vikus* does, however, suggest that the extra mural settlement, which can be seen in the aerial photographs, and which has had some small-scale excavation (Bellhouse 1959: 15-31; Miller and McPhillips 2005), was a properly constituted *vicus* under Roman law, as was the *vicus* at Housesteads (*RIB* 1616; Allason-Jones 2013: 72). Whether 'the masters of the villagers' were from the native elite or were veterans of the army is not entirely clear; nor is it clear why the masters or the villagers they represented were content to offer Jupiter an altar which does not give the impression of having been expensive to commission nor having much skill lavished on it. The apparent disinterest may suggest the villagers were following expected behaviour, but only at a minimum level; a similar lack of enthusiasm may be discerned in the altar set up by the 'villagers of Vindolanda', also to Vulcan (*RIB* 1700).

Other classical deities respected at Old Carlisle include the two military deities Mars (*RIB* 900) and Hercules (*RIB* 892). The latter inscription is of particular interest due to its unexpected hint of military action, as Sigilius Emeritus states he gave the god 'at his own expense a share of the spoils'. Also unexpected is the altar to Bellona, a Roman war deity whose main temple was in the Campus Martius area of Rome, an area that was used to accommodate ambassadors from foreign powers and where senators received victorious generals before they processed in triumph into Rome (*RIB* 890; *CSIR* I.11, no. 7). This is the only altar dedicated to this key Roman deity to be found on a site in Britain and for it to be discovered at the small, and seemingly unimportant fort, of Old Carlisle is of interest. The particularly elegant carving on the front of the capital suggests a well-trained and talented sculptor, with the work notably more accomplished than is seen on the Jupiter altars discussed above. The only other indication of the worship of this deity in Britain is in *Historia Augusta: the Life of Septimius Severus* (22.4-7), a source that can be flawed in its accuracy, but claims that: 'He [Severus] was returning to his nearest quarters from inspecting the wall at Luguvallum', 'when he reached the town..... he was taken to the Temple of Bellona'. As he 'betook himself to the palace' after he had 'abandoned the sacrifice in disgust' (due to having been given a black animal to sacrifice rather than a white one), it is more likely, however, that this temple was at the imperial base in York, rather than near Carlisle (see Birley 1988, 184-5; my thanks are due to Andrew Birley for alerting me to this reference).

An armed male figure, who may have been intended to depict Mars in figural form, wears body armour with a cloak (either a *paludamentum* or a *sagum*) held in place on his right shoulder by a disc brooch; the fabric

is draped over his left arm with the end over his left shoulder (*CSIR* I. 11, no. 68). The folds of the cloak as they pass over his shoulder have been produced by drilling a series of circular holes. As three-dimensional funerary statues are not found in Britain at this time and examples of 3rd century cuirassed soldiers found on mainland Europe are invariably in relief, Coulston has argued that this is unlikely to be an image of an emperor - despite the possible *paludamentum* - as those found so far have all been in copper alloy, not stone (1993; see also a Mars statue wearing contemporary armour, including a ring buckle, from Custom Shrubs, Glos. *CSIR* I.7, no. 59).

There are two altars dedicated to the predominant local deity Belatucadrus, who appears to have been particularly worshipped in Cumbria, with the bulk of the dedications being found at Brougham and Old Penrith, the forts to the immediate south-east of Old Carlisle (Fairless 1984; Birley 1986). The idea that the earthwork site at Clifton Dykes, near Brougham, was the centre for the cult of Belatucadrus was a theory put forward by R. G. Collingwood (1922) and supported by Summerson, Trueman and Harrison (1998: 8; see also Jones 1999: 92), but was disproved by Edwards (2006). Belatucadrus is equated with Mars on several inscriptions even though, as Fairless (1984) and Birley (1986) both pointed out, most of the dedicators were either civilians or auxiliaries and not legionary officers. In 1771, there was a lively discussion at a Society of Antiquaries of London meeting at which it was debated whether Belatucadrus was equated with Mars or Apollo; the meeting concluded that he was equated with Mars, but Mr Pegge, even though conceding victory, admitted that 'we may make anything of anything' (SAL Minutes xii, Dec. 5th, 1771: 257-9). This was probably not a debate that would have exercised the inhabitants of Old Carlisle in the Roman period.

One of the altars to Belatucadrus was dedicated by Aurelius Tasulus, who describes himself as a veteran, although without stating the unit(s) in which he served (*RIB* 887). The only unit at Old Carlisle for which there is epigraphic evidence is the *ala Augusta* (*RIB* 890; 893; 894; 895; 897; 905). However, built into a barn at one of the farms is the relief of a very characterful bull (*CSIR* I. 11, no. 351). The head is large in proportion to the stumpy legs and the horns are spread wide across the top of the curved frame in the manner of a Hereford bull. Amongst the numerous legions that had the bull as their symbol, only the *VI Victrix* and the *IX Hispana* are known to have served in Britain; this sculpture may suggest that either individuals or a vexillation of one of these legions was stationed at Old Carlisle.

Other deities for which there is epigraphic evidence include 'the Genius' to whom the brothers Aurelius Martialis and Aurelius Eburacio acknowledged their indebtedness having 'fufilled their vow on behalf of themselves and their family' (*RIB* 891). There is also a dedication to the 'Mother Goddesses' but, unusually for this area, the deities are here linked directly with the 'welfare of the emperor, Marcus Aurelius Alexander Pius Felix Augustus and of Julia Mamea, mother of our Lord and of the army' (*RIB* 901). This may be dated to 222-25 CE.

Other religious references are vaguer. Flavius Aventinus, for example, dedicated a small altar to 'The God' without any clues as to which deity he was invoking (*RIB* 904), while a dedication stone records that the prefect Lucius Vaterius Marcellus 'restored this shrine' 'for the goddess'. The initial A of the goddess's name survives but, whilst Wright mused on who this deity might be, there are too many options for an obvious deity to be suggested (*RIB* 886).

A particularly interesting altar was dedicated 'To the Land of the Batavians' by Ateius Cocceianus, 'an imperial slave' who 'made this willingly when released from his vow' (*RIB* 902). Imperial slaves can often be identified as civil servants, so this is unlikely to suggest that there was a military unit of Batavians at Old Carlisle; it merely indicates the tribal origins of an individual, albeit a possibly important one.

**Funerary evidence**

Most of the rest of the surviving sculptures are linked to the funerary beliefs of the population; largely because the cemetery was on arable land and thus stones were, indeed still are, ploughed out regularly. Although pinecones can be associated with Attis, they are more often found in funerary contexts and were used across the Roman empire as symbols of immortality to decorate funerary monuments (Allason-Jones 2022). In Britain their distribution is uneven, and in the Hinterland of Hadrian's Wall, other than a single example from Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham (*CSIR* I.11, no. 147), free-standing pinecones are confined to sites in Cumbria, with two from Old Carlisle alone (*CSIR* I.11, nos. 149-50), suggesting it was a locally preferred motif. The curious distribution across the province may suggest a late Hadrianic-early Antonine date.

Lions can also be found throughout the Roman Empire as funerary symbols, a practice that can be traced back to the Greek and Etruscan periods. Hunter has analysed 415 examples of lions in art from the northern provinces of the empire, of which 225 are free-standing statues (2003: 61). This research has revealed a bias towards the frontier zones, particularly in the north-west of Britain, with the majority coming from Cumbria - all of which are of local stone and tend to have a distinctively

Figure 2. Tombstone of an elderly man from Old Carlisle (*CSIR* I.11, no. 351).

local character, rather than following Mediterranean pattern books. There is only one lion sculpture from Old Carlisle, but this supports the general picture that funerary beliefs in Roman Cumbria, whilst following mainstream Mediterranean beliefs, still had local peculiarities (*CSIR* I.11, no. 359).

The tombstones are also a noticeable mixture of mainstream Roman and local. Two of the figural memorials depict a woman and child. One shows the lower half of a seated woman, whose rather large left hand rests on her lap holding a bird and a stick-like object, possibly a spindle (*CSIR* I. 11, no. 177). At her knee stands the figure of a young child wearing a knee length tunic (Gallic coat) with a cape over it, possibly holding another bird. The child's roughly pecked hair, which is worn brushed back from the forehead and ends in a roll at the neck, suggests a young girl; Wright and Phillips were of the further opinion that the hairstyle suggested a 3rd century AD date (1975: 78). To the right of the scene is an engaged column and it may be presumed there would have been a corresponding column on the left. This is the only sculpture south of Hadrian's Wall that Phillips included in his list of products from his postulated Carlisle-based sculpture workshop (Phillips 1976: 104-5).

The other woman and child tombstone is less complete, but enough survives to identify an adult figure, presumed to be female, holding a baby in the crook of her right arm (*CSIR* I. 11, no. 178). The woman's hand is large in proportion to the baby, with a very prominent thumb. The naked child is stylistically depicted and appears to be kicking, with its left arm resting on the woman's forearm and its right-hand holding an object, possibly a rattle, up to the adult's missing head. The carving has been produced by drilling lines of round holes and then chiselling between them – a similar technique to that used to carve the Mars figure mentioned above. It is possible that this may be another product of Phillips' postulated Carlisle workshop (1976).

Individual men are also remembered. Still incorporated into the fabric of a barn near Wigton is the relief of a bust of an elderly man with curly hair and a beard. He is wearing a cloak, clasped at his right shoulder by a disc brooch, and with the fabric pulled forward over his shoulders; he also wears a tunic and a body cuirass. The letters DM (To the spirits of the departed...), are recorded as being in the spandrels but they are no longer discernible and the evidence for them having existed is not strong (Figure 2. *RIB* 911: *CSIR* I. 11, no. 174).

The most recently discovered tombstone was found only in this century and records the deaths of a number of people: Aurelia Toisia, Aurelius Marinus, Aurelius Marianus, Lupia (who was between 25 and 30 when she died), a child who lived 5-9 years; Vitalis who also lived 5-9 years; and two other possible children: Pannonius and Saturninus (*CSIR* I. 11, no. 206). The rather rudimentary and half-hearted decoration down the frame is in contradiction to the care that has been taken with the inscription. Tomlin suggests this mixture of adult and children's names implies that the

stone marked a family mausoleum or communal burial plot (2014: 432, no. 2). Whether they died at the same time, due to disease or an accident, or were just interred as and when they died, is also not known, despite the names having all been inscribed at the same time.

A single, and from her name, British woman who is remembered at the site is Tancorix (*RIB* 908). Her very rudimentary inscription records her specifically as a woman, possibly because the suffix of her name is more commonly attributed to male names (Birley 1979: 112). She died at the age of 60, but the inscription does not record who was responsible for the memorial. As well as this local person with her single Celtic name, there are people with the full Roman *tria nomina* as well as those who only offer two names. Some record, proudly, their foreign antecedents, such as Publius Aelius Magnus, son of Publius of the Sergian voting tribe, from Mursa in Lower Pannonia (*RIB* 894) and Aemilius Crispinus from Thysdrus in Africa (*RIB* 897). There is also the Batavian mentioned earlier (*RIB* 902). This was certainly a site where many cultures came together, but how these cultures interacted is only hinted at by the slight suggestion of a lack of engagement with official Roman religion on behalf of the villagers who dedicated the altar to Jupiter Best and Greatest and Vulcan (*RIB* 899).

## Classical mythology

Despite the 'confusion of ungrammatical datives and ablatives' on the altar dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus during the command of Aemilius Crispinus (*RIB* 897), the uninscribed sculpture does imply some of the inhabitants were well educated enough to be familiar with classical mythology. One stone has a well-carved dolphin in relief, beak pointing down, on a leaf or the crest of a wave (*CSIR* I.11, no. 364). To the left of the frame is a naked bearded triton with curly hair and possibly a small cap. He holds what appears to be a trident in his left hand with its head across the back of his shoulders. Another attribute, possibly a conch shell trumpet, is held upright in his right hand. His tail coils several times and ends in a trilobate fin. A second dolphin lies below the triton's tail. Bruce suggested that this stone may be from the same monument as two others from the site (*LS* no. 842). The first depicts a snarling feline animal which appears to have fins in the place of feet (*CSIR* I.11, no. 362). The end of its tail is plumed and held high over the beast's back. Behind its head is a plant or possibly the similarly plumed tail of another beast. The other possibly associated relief shows several sea creatures, including one with a feline head and a dolphin's tail; behind this is a dolphin with an arching tail, blowing water from its beak, A third creature, possibly a bear, can be seen behind the dolphin. If these three pieces do come from the same monument, then it has been a major piece, both in size and execution. A decorated base was thought by Hutchinson to also be associated with this piece, although this seems less likely (1794, ii: no. 8). Toynbee was of the opinion the combined scenes represented 'certainly an architectural piece' (1964: 143), but it could also be from a funerary monument, such as the tower tomb from Igel in Germany (Espérandieu 1915: no, 5178, ill. p. 380). Tritons are not commonly depicted in Romano-British art and most appear in funerary contexts (see *CSIR* I. 3, no. 80; I. 9, no, 61).

The rectangular face of an otherwise typical building stone is carved with the figure of Pegasus galloping to the right (*CSIR* I.11, no. 365). The animal is stylised, rather in the manner of a horse on a Celtic coin rather than a classical depiction, with the front legs held stiffly forward. Its tail is raised, and its two wings are indicated by curved ribs projecting from the horse's back. The head is held down and the mouth is open. Pegasus was one of the emblems of the Second Legion, so this stone may have marked building work by the legion at Old Carlisle, although there is no epigraphic corroboration.

## Conclusion

The inscriptions from the site confirm the population of the fort and *vicus* at Old Carlisle to have been mixed. Given that Old Carlisle was a cavalry fort, the commanding officer always seemed to have been a prefect which, given the fort's small size, is interesting. Seven prefects who served at the site are known by name: Lucius Vaterius Marcellus (*RIB* 886), Rufinus (*RIB* 890; whose son, Latinianus, joined him in the dedication), Tiberius Claudius Justinus (*RIB* 893), Publius Aelius Magnus (*RIB* 894), Egnatius Verecundus (*RIB* 895) Aemilius Crispinus (*RIB* 897) and Septimenus Rusticus (*RIB* 903); one name has not survived (*RIB* 905). The names of individual soldiers from the other ranks are not as well known. Maelonius Secundus, however, is recorded as being a cavalryman in the *ala Augusta* and a *sesquiplicarius*; that is, he received one and a half times the basic salary of a cavalryman; this bonus was usually given if a soldier had distinguished himself in some way, such as in battle (*RIB* 907). Amatius Ingenuus, who died aged 60, may have been a veteran and possibly one whose heirs could afford to erect the tomb mentioned in the inscription (*RIB* 906).

Our picture of life at Old Carlisle is solely reliant on the carved stone, as Old Carlisle has produced little else other than some 4th century pottery from the fort itself and some 2nd - 3rd century pottery, a steelyard weight, a brooch and a lockbolt from the *vicus* (Bellhouse 1959, 30-1). An assessment of 48 coins, in two private collections, reveals a coin range from 69-96 CE to 388 CE (Shotter 1996). Shotter identified a large number of

Flavian coins, and considered this might point to an Agricolan fort on the site, but decided they were mostly very worn and thus had probably been in circulation for some years before arriving on the site. Curiously, Trajanic and Hadrianic coins are not well represented, despite this being a period when considerable activity might be presumed for the area. Shotter suggested that this could indicate 'some complexity in the occupation-pattern in the first half of the 2nd century CE, perhaps coincident with changing frontier policies'. The main period of activity implied by the coin evidence appears to have been in the Antonine period, with a tailing off from the mid-3rd century. This evidence, it must be stressed, comes from the *vicus* only, and a very different coin scatter might be found if the fort was excavated. The apparent spike in the Antonine period, however, does compare with a similar spike in the *vicus* coins from Housesteads (Allason-Jones 2013).

Old Carlisle, it can be concluded, had a very mixed, even cosmopolitan, population with locals, military men, and families mingling on the site; this is normal for a fort in the Military Zone. What is slightly unusual at Old Carlisle, however, are the strong links to the reigning emperors, as indicated by the known units on the site: the *ala Augusta* and the *numerus* Solensium, as well as the dedications to the welfare of the Imperial family, rather than just the emperor himself (*RIB* 986; 897; 901). One of the prefects, Aemilius Crispinus, also mentions that he came from Thrysdus in Africa, the place where Gordian I was proclaimed emperor in AD 238 (*RIB* 897). Along with the dedication to Bellona, this may indicate that the fort was of more importance to the Roman command structure than its size and position might imply and was manned by forces who might be expected above all others to be loyal to Rome. The suggestion that this imperial link was the result of a visit from Septimius Severus, as implied by the passage in *Historia Augusta* (22.4-7), is implausible, given that many of the inscriptions predate this putative imperial visitation. The somewhat careless carving of the altars dedicated to Jupiter, particularly that dedicated by the 'masters of the villages', may suggest that a strong and very loyal Roman presence was needed at this site in the face of an undercurrent of disinterest from the local population – a hint of 'resistance by apathy'?

## Abbreviations

*ANRW* H. Temporini and W. Haase (eds). 1972-86. *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt.* Berlin.

*CSIR* Allason-Jones, L. 2023. *The Hinterland of Hadrian's Wall and Derbyshire (Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani*. Great Britain. Vol. I.11). Oxford.

*CW* *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Archaeological and Antiquarian Society.*

*ND* *Notitia Dignatatum.*

*LS* Bruce, J.C. 1875. *Lapidarium Septentrinale,* London and Newcastle upon Tyne.

*RIB* Collingwood, R.G. and R.P. Wright 1965. *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, I: *Inscriptions on Stone*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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# Setting the Frame: Further Thoughts on the *Suovetaurilia* Scene on the Bridgeness Distance Slab

David J. Breeze, Christof Flügel and Erik P. Graafstal

Simon James's long-term interest in Dura-Europos is the inspiration for this investigation of the process of sacrifice in the Roman army. The starting point is the depiction of Julius Terentius, commander of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, in a wall painting at Dura pouring a libation (Figure 1). At the other end of the Roman Empire is the equally famous scene, rendered in stone this time, on the Bridgeness Distance Slab on the Antonine Wall of an officer, likely the legate, of the Second Legion making a sacrifice on an altar. It is this scene that is the centrepiece of our discussion.

## The Bridgeness Distance Slab

The Antonine Wall in Scotland is notable for the series of Distance Slabs which record the lengths of the frontier constructed by the soldiers of the three legions of Britain, the Second, Sixth and Twentieth. Twenty of these stones have been recovered in whole or in part, though one has since been destroyed. Several bear sculptural scenes recording fighting, Rome's victory over her enemies, and, in one instance, a sacrifice. This occurs on the Bridgeness Distance Slab (*RIB* 2139; fig. 2).

The stone was erected by the Second Legion to mark the erection of 4652 paces (*c.* 6.89 km) of the linear rampart under the Emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161). This emperor had ordered the advance of his army into southern Scotland at the very beginning of his reign, sending a senior and experienced general, Quintus Lollius Urbicus, to undertake the task. Victory was proclaimed by 1 August 142 CE (Hanson and Maxwell 1986: 134-136) and a start was made on building the new frontier before the end of the governorship probably in the same year (*RIB* 2191-2192). Therefore, the erection of the Distance Slabs is usually assigned to *c.* 143 or thereabouts. Hassall, however, suggested that the sector marked by the Bridgeness Distance Slab, was in

Figure 1. Julius Terentius, commander of the Cohors XX Palmyrenorum, in a wall painting at Dura-Europos pouring a libation (north wall of the pronaos in the Temple of Bel/the Palmyrene Gods, *c.* 239).

Figure 2. The Bridgeness Distance Slab with reconstructed colours based on surviving traces (Louisa Campbell, University of Glasgow) and details of the left and right-hand panels, the latter before restoration (National Museums of Scotland).

the second (or third) block of construction work, which would push its erection at least a year or two forward from the victory (Hassall 1983).

The Bridgeness Distance Slab is unique in its arrangement. The central panel stating the emperor's titles, the name of the legion and the length of rampart constructed is flanked to one side by a scene of a cavalryman riding down enemies and to the other by the sacrifice. Assembled are three animals, a boar, ram and bull, making this a rare instance of a *suovetaurilia* sacrifice in provincial Roman sculpture. It is usually considered that this scene marks the calling of support from the gods for a Roman victory in the ensuing fighting. Recently, however, Everett Wheeler has suggested that the sacrifice could relate to the start of the building of the new frontier (Wheeler 2009: 242).

**The *suovetaurilia* rite: official occasions**

When it comes to sacrificial scenes the main work of reference still is Inez Scott Ryberg's 1955 publication, *Rites of State Religion in Roman Art*. This monograph is usually cited as justifying the interpretation of the sacrifice on the Bridgeness Distance Slab as occurring at the beginning of Pius' Scottish campaign. Ryberg certainly cites such events, but she also records others. First, it is worth emphasising that Ryberg's focus is on the depiction of the event in art, in her case sculpture. Usefully, accounts in literature are referenced.

Ryberg discusses several scenes depicting the sacrifice, including three scenes on Trajan's Column, which are described in detail. She points out these are 'essentially the same' and show the procession of musicians, attendants, victims, and soldiers outside the camp while inside the emperor with attendants stands at an altar making a libation. Ryberg, in noting the slight variations in the depictions of the ceremony, states that this does not imply any variation in the performance of the ritual which was fixed by religious tradition. In the sacrifice scene on the Bridgeness Distance Slab, the person performing the ceremony is presumably the legionary legate. He is accompanied by attendants and musicians with the three animals in the foreground.

Ryberg (1955: 33, n. 66) lists, with references, the occasions on which a *suovetaurilia*, essentially a purification sacrifice, would be held:

- at the closing of the *lustrum* (the purification sacrifice made after the census held every five years),
- after a prodigy (i.e. a special event),
- after a treaty,
- before a campaign,
- at the close of a campaign,
- after a triumph, on the Capitol Hill in Rome.

In addition, Tacitus refers to a *suovetaurilia* having taken place 'in the Roman manner' before the army crossed the Euphrates into Parthian territory in 35 (*Ann*. VI.37.2). The same rite was performed at the start of the rebuilding of the temple for the Capitoline triad after this had been destroyed during the civil war of 69 CE (Tacitus, *Hist*. IV.53). Intriguing archaeological evidence is provided by the skulls of the traditional *suovetaurilia* animals found at the base of a pit next to the great temple at Elst in the Netherlands associated with Hercules Magusanus. These can be tentatively linked to the inauguration of the temple (Bogaers 1955: 141; Robeerst 2008: 99, n. 262), around 100 as we now know (Heeren, Hoff and Derks 2008: 41-42). Finally, it is worth referencing the unspecified sacrificial ceremony that was carried out at the start of the building of the fort at Bu Njem (*AE* 1976: 698 with 1988: 1102, dating to 201-5).

There were thus several occasions when a *suovetaurilia* sacrifice might be held. In light of this short survey it would seem possible for the one on the Bridgeness Distance Slab to have related to the beginning of the Scottish campaign, or its end, or the beginning or end of the building of the Antonine Wall, or even its inauguration; how might we decide which? The first step is to examine the scene.

**The composition of the Bridgeness Distance Slab: mistake or meaning?**

The Bridgeness Distance Slab is formed of several elements:

- a central ansate panel with inscription, the *ansae* taking the shape of two *pelta* shields with griffin heads, a common variant on the Distance Slabs (*RIB* 2173, 2185, 2203, 2204),
- a kind of frieze above it supported by or between two freestanding, spirally fluted columns (like on a building inscription of the Sixth Legion, *RIB* 2163, from Croy Hill) supporting a frieze which have nothing to do with the two scenes on both sides but set the frame for the inscription,
- a sacrificial ceremony to the right purposefully placed in the architectural setting of a temple or shrine, probably referring to well-known imagery,
- a classic image of a rider defeating the enemy to the left, carefully placed between its own architectural elements, a setting apparently intended to suggest a gate with a rider sallying out of it.

We may note the prominent role of architectural elements in the composition, like the *kymation* frieze of the central panel, which is clearly influenced by architecture (cf. the inscription frames on *RIB* 1147 and 1148, both set up by the Second Legion at Corbridge a few years earlier, the latter with acanthus ornament). Frieze and spiralled columns together define a further architectural background, whilst setting the frame for the central inscription. Furthermore, the side panels provide two oblique perspectives, both with architectural references: a temple pediment resting on two columns on the right side, and an arched gateway with Tuscan columns on the left side.

What is striking about the Bridgeness Distance Slab is the careful arrangement of all the elements. In the sacrifice scene, for example, there is a prominent place for a flagged standard with the name of the Second Legion inscribed on it. The shaft of the flag (*vexillum*) is aligned with the apex of the temple pediment and forms the main vertical axis of the whole scene, which itself can be divided into a quiet 'setting-the-background' foil, with persons standing frontal on both sides of the *vexillum* and the actual sacrifice scene with a clear movement from right to left towards the central inscription. The prominent position of the *vexillum* suggests that the main statement of the scene is not so much about the actual sacrifice (which is very standard), but the fact that the Second Legion, or a detachment (*vexillatio*), performed it. This links the Bridgeness stone to the other distance slabs, which all name the building *vexillatio* prominently in their inscriptions, and potentially connects the sacrifice with the construction of the Antonine Wall.

The movement from right to left on the sacrifice scene is mirrored by the movement from left to right of the sallying rider on the left-hand scene, so that both scenes frame the central inscription. Right- and left-hand scenes are both placed in oblique perspective, with the innermost columns of the arched gateway and the temple placed well to the rear, so that both lively scenes are facing the central inscription panel. There is another mirror effect in that the horse's hooves are in front of the innermost column of the gateway while the kneeling figure (the *cultuarius*? holding a knife?) in the right-hand panel is in front of the innermost column of the temple. The sculptor definitely had a sense of perspective, not only in the individual scenes, but also in the overall composition of the Distance Slab,

which subtly uses superpositions to suggest depth and direction.

Such 'stratigraphy' is also employed in the left-hand panel to suggest the successive stages of defeat. The same? Briton is shown (1) still armed but fallen under the horse, (2) wounded, with a broken spear in his back and his right arm raised, (3) captured? and fearing what might come, and (4) beheaded (Meyr and Flügel 2022: 44; cf. Close-Brooks 1981: 519, for traces of red paint on the neck of the beheaded Briton and at the base of his severed head; see. fig. 2). In another play with depth, in stage 3 the Briton appears to be leaning against the spiralled column.

The same play with depth and perspective, and with well-known imagery, is seen on another Distance Slab of the Second Legion, found at Summerston (*RIB* 2193), where several elements, like the Victory and the horse's and capricorn's forefeet, overlay the central inscription panel as well as the frame of the whole Distance Slab. A further notable parallel is the use of similar symbols for shields. The general stylistic similarity led Phillips to propose that *RIB* 2193 'appears to have been the work of the same sculptor' (1974: 178). The sculptor certainly knew his repertoire: when depicting Victory he played with well-known imperial imagery, replacing the globe on which this Victoria type conventionally balances by a barbarian's head. The Bridgeness Distance Slab sculptor's eye for detail can be observed also in the form of the stone altar which has numerous parallels in military contexts or the left-hand panel Tuscan columns (including the detail of the *anulus*) which have parallels, for example, at Bath and in the military architecture of the Antonine Wall, for example at the headquarters building (*principia*) of Bar Hill. He also carefully depicted the disc brooches of the figures.

Phillips argues that the sculptor of the Bridgeness Distance Slab made a mistake: having started with the left hand scene, he discovered that the central text panel needed more space, so he ran into trouble with the right hand scene, which he now had to squeeze and superimpose over the right hand spiralling column. However, complex pieces like the Bridgeness Distance Slab surely were outlined before the carving started. Moreover, plenty of space remained in the inscription's 5th line. Also note how the play with depth using superposition starts right at the left-hand panel, with the spiralling column partly overlying the horse's left forefoot. One of Phillips' arguments is the disproportion between the left and right hand scene, but *RIB* 2193 has exactly the same disproportion. Rather than having made a mistake, the Bridgeness sculptor appears to intentionally play with depth perspective. Which raises the question: did he use this 'special effect' to suggest a succession of actions?

The two flanking scenes are arranged slightly obliquely, each mirroring the other. But there is a difference: the left scene is placed perspectively *behind* the central panel with its two spiralled columns, whilst the right scene is placed *before* it. This arrangement looks well-considered, i.e. intentional and therefore meaningful, not necessarily indicating a sequence but perhaps just emphasising the primacy of the right-hand panel.

Figure 3. Sacrifice of a bull in front of a temple on a marble relief in Gustav III's Museum of Antiquities at the Royal Palace in Stockholm (photograph by Wolfgang Sauber).

**Discussion: realities and references**

The sculptor of the Bridgeness Distance Slab took special care to make clear that the rite of *suovetaurilia* had been carried out according to tradition, that is:

- with the animals proceeding in the right order,
- the male sex of the animals made explicit, specifying that these were *suovetaurilia maiora* ('greater') consisting of full-grown victims, *verres*, *aries*, *taurus*, boar, ram, bull, typical of state sacrifices (Varro, *Rust*. 2.1.10; Livy 1.44.2; *Acta fr. Arv.* p. 143 Henzen; p. 407 Scheid) in contrast to *suovetaurilia lactentia* consisting of suckling pig (*porcus*), lamb (*agnus*), and calf (*vitulus*) (Cato, *Agr*. 141),
- the person performing the unbloody pre-sacrifice being *togatus*, although not with veiled head (*capite velato*),
- the ceremony taking place in front of a shrine or temple (cf. Latte 1960: 386), the latter indicated by a three-*fasces* pediment resting on Tuscan columns.

A temple pediment occurs in many depictions of *suovetaurilia* sacrifices, not just in Roman 'state art', but also in less grand settings like the altar in front of the temple for the Genius Augusti in Pompeii and the sacrificial scene on a marble relief in the Royal Palace in Stockholm (Figure 3). Scene 8 of Trajan's Column showing a *suovetaurilia* sacrifice in front of a marching camp also appears to cite the traditional image, with a tent gable replacing the usual temple pediment and the field altar rendered in the same ashlar-like blocks that were used to indicate a Roman camp rampart, perhaps to show that the altar shown in this scene was equally made of grass sods, in conformity with tradition (Tacitus, *Hist*. IV.53; Latte 1960: 386).

There is one element on the right-hand panel which is unique, the appearance of a flag (*vexillum*) bearing the words LEG II AUG. All the inscriptions recording the Sixth and Twentieth Legions on the Antonine Wall, with the exception of the somewhat unusual *RIB* 2184, refer to detachments (*vexillationes*), but this word is never used on the Distance Slabs of the Second Legion. but it seems more likely that of all the legionary standards the vexillum was used as its flag offered space to write out that this was the Second Legion acting (Breeze 1989: 141; for a similar instance of artistic licence cf. RIB 3507 from Hutcheson Hill which has Victory offering a crown to the eagle of Legio XX, although the inscription specifies that it was a detachment that had carried out the work). Its position right behind the sacrificer indicates that this person represents the legion, surely meaning that he is the *legatus legionis*, and thus the scene is somewhat similar to that of Julius Terentius on the Dura painting who is named and accompanied by a flag. As Phillips rightly emphasises, 'on official monuments, both military and civil, it is the emperor who normally acts as the sacrificant' (1974: 178, with reference to Ryberg 1955), so the obvious stand-in would be one of his legates. The presence of the legate, the commanding officer of the legion, implies that this is not a detachment but the main body of the legion. This prompts the interesting suggestion that, as the most senior officer present in the north, he was in charge of the whole building project. If so, could this help explain this extravagant dedication?

The Second Legion may have been present in its entirety because its normal role in south Wales was different from that of the northern Legions Six and Twenty. The Second Legion had been available for preparatory construction work at Corbridge in 139-140 CE. While the Distance Slabs imply equal work allocations to all three legions, the Second *may* have had a greater share elsewhere, perhaps in building forts or the Military Way. Is it a coincidence that the legion dominates the (meagre) record of fort-building units? We know that the Second Legion was up in the north right from the beginning, before the construction of the Antonine Wall started, building the stone fort at Balmuildy (*RIB* 2191-2192, with Hodgson 2020 and Graafstal 2024).

When did the carefully depicted *suovetaurilia* sacrifice of the Second Legion take place? With the reading direction of Roman reliefs usually going from left to right, and given the 'stratigraphy' of the scenes on the Bridgeness stone, there is a suggestion in the iconography that warfare had successfully taken place before the scene of sacrifice. If that is accepted the sacrifice may have been related to the building of the Antonine Wall as suggested by Wheeler rather than the commencement of the campaign two or three years earlier. With the latter scenario there is a chronological problem anyway. The Scottish victory was proclaimed by *c*. August 142 CE. The ensuing construction of the Antonine Wall would have required logistical preparation and was interrupted by an incisive change of plan. After a start had been made with the building of the forts at Balmuildy and Castlecary in stone, there was a change to the use of turf and timber as the main building material (Hodgson 2020), with incisive consequences for the operational concept of the Antonine Wall (Graafstal 2024). Actual work on the Antonine Wall probably started in a 20-mile long central sector (Hassall 1983), with more than one work season implied by the archaeological evidence (Graafstal and Breeze 2023). Only in a following season did the eastern sector come on the stocks. So, the Bridgeness Distance Slab was probably not cut earlier than 144 CE or so, which makes it unlikely that the Bridgeness Distance Slab *suovetaurilia* refers to the beginning of the Scottish

campaign. Further, the implication is that the legion's legate is unlikely to have been the same person as the one who led the legion from Caerleon to Corbridge in 139 or from there to Scotland the next year (contra Breeze 1991).

Where did the sacrifice take place? There are two potential pointers. Firstly, the action appears to be taking place before a stone building, its pediment indicating a temple. Secondly, while several sacrifice scenes in Roman art, including Julius Terentius, show a portable altar, the priest on the Distance Slab is pouring a libation on a stone altar. The two elements might be taken to imply that the sacrifice took place in front of a stone building such as a regimental headquarters building. Does this take us back to the Second Legion's base at Caerleon, or perhaps to Corbridge, and thus to the start of the Scottish campaign? This is, again, unlikely. The sculptor of the Bridgeness Distance Slab may just be referring to a traditional image of an open-air *suovetaurilia* in front of a temple, in open air that is. Concerning the altars: the Hadrianic tondi on Constantine's Arch show various sacrifice scenes in free nature, for example, a sacrifice to Diana (Koeppel 1986: 29 fig. 8 cat. 6) or Silvanus (Koeppel 1986: 31 fig.10 cat. 8). So, a stone altar does not necessarily indicate a 'stone setting' like the courtyard of a headquarters building.

A more general disclaimer is in place: we need to be careful with reading concrete 'historical' references (i.e. to recent realities) in the Bridgeness scenes. The stone borrows from a stock of well-established imperial imagery of Roman victory and all that came with it, like the proper preparation through prescribed rites and barbarians being routinely cut and ridden down and killed. Paul Zanker in his 2010 book on Roman art emphasizes the basically 'ahistorical' nature of seemingly 'historical' or 'narrative' reliefs. 'The sequence of events and the manner in which they are depicted on such reliefs are highly standardized.' The main moments of the Marcomannian war of Marcus Aurelius were presented on his triumphal arch (and later reused in Constantine's) 'as a sequence of predetermined rituals' (Zanker 2010, 98). The 'historical reliefs (...) were intended to commemorate central scenes of imperial rituals and to communicate their importance (...); they were not intended to preserve details of historical reality' (Zanker 2010: 99). Several Antonine Wall distance slabs demonstrate this lack of historical reality. *RIB* 2208 (Ferrydyke) and *RIB* 3507 (Hutcheson Hill) both have elaborate temple facades, while columns with spiral decorations and corinthian capitals occur on *RIB* 2163 from Croy Hill.

With this in mind, we must now turn to the left-hand panel. While the depiction of a Roman cavalryman riding down his enemies is a familiar topos on sculptural items and even on Roman brooches (Meyr and Flügel 2022: 47-48), the scene of the rider sallying forth from an apparent gate is not such an established topos. It seems that the triumphant rider is passing through the gate, as there is a clear perspective on this panel, with the horse's feet placed before the right gate column and


Figure 4. Trajan as victorious rider, detail from the Great Trajanic Frieze, re-used in Constantine's Arch at Rome (photograph by C. Feraglia , D-DAI-ROM37.328).


Figure 5. Sestertius of Trajan (RIC II 534, dating to 107-110), its reverse showing the emperor on horseback riding down a Dacian (Trajan (98-117 CE) Æ Sestertius. Rome, A.D .107-110. - S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI, Emperor on horseback. (vcoins.com), accessed 21-1-2024).

the spear shaft before the arch. The rider is depicted with considerable detail. 'The horseman is shown by his dress to be an officer, not an ordinary soldier' (Philips 1974: 178), but the *pteryges*, muscle cuirass, possible *paludamentum* and closed shoes point to a far higher-ranking person: these are the paraphernalia of the emperor himself (Figure 4; pers. comm. Martina Meyr). This reading is supported by traces of red ochre paint on the horserider's cloak (Figure 2), probably intended as the imperial purple (Campbell 2020: 102, fig. 8.4; Meyr and Flügel 2022: 44, fig. 27).

What we have here is the victorious emperor as the embodiment of the Roman army who takes military action against the enemies outside the Roman Empire. The arched gateway, with its Tuscan columns, of course has no parallels in Roman military architecture, but the image effectively communicates that the action is taking place 'outside', beyond the virtual city wall that surrounds the Roman Empire, to paraphrase Aelius Aristides (*Roman Orations* 26: 80-84, with Flügel *et al.* 2017). The image of the victorious emperor riding down and thrusting a spear at a barbarian may have been transmitted through coins of Vespasian (RIC II.1 Vespasian 386), Domitian (*RIC* II.1 Domitian 280, 470, 529-530, 638) and Trajan, clearly identifiable as the emperor through his waving *paludamentum* and, on some, his muscle cuirass (*RIC* II Trajan 534-543). On a variant of the latter series the gesture of the fallen Dacian is so similar to our Briton in stage 2 that direct inspiration seems a very real possibility (Figure 5).

Finally, and fundamentally, inscriptions normally commemorate acts – acts of construction, dedication, inauguration, interment, etc. The Antonine Wall Distance Slabs, record the actuality of building the frontier, in a context of recent victory and subjection. These inscriptions were placed upon completion of the sectors in question, probably clustered in pairs at the end points of building sectors. There can also be little doubt that the Bridgeness Distance Slab marked the eastern terminus of the Antonine Wall. In this light, there certainly seems room for an interpretation of the *suovetaurilia* sacrifice as having taken place upon completion of (this sector of) the Antonine Wall, so that it really was an inauguration rite. We may compare the sacrifice of a bull performed on the completion of the Danube bridge at Drobeta as depicted on Trajan's Column (Figure 6). It is now time to return to the place where the Bridgeness Distance Slab was found.

## The Bridgeness Distance Slab's findspot

The Bridgeness Distance Slab was discovered in 1868, 'immediately in front of the rocky knoll on which Bridgeness Tower is built' (Macdonald 1934: 103). 'It was found lying face down on the promontory of whinstone at a point 19 feet above the level of ordinary spring tides. The stone, which I saw lifted up from its resting-place on the day it was found, was lying face down, not flat on the ground, but over a hollow in the soil, and it had evidently been carefully laid there and covered up with a few inches of soil' (Cadell 1913: 124; see also Bailey and Devereux 1987: 96-97). If we follow Macdonald, the original findspot must be around the point where the projection of Bridgeness Lane intersects the reconstructed line of the Antonine Wall (Figure 7). Like several other Distance Slabs, the stone was found face down, buried in a specially prepared resting place, it would seem from Cadell's description (Breeze and Ferris 2015: 20, 33-35). Matt Symonds has recently discussed this practice, adding the ritually deposited inscriptions at MC 50 (High House) on Hadrian's Wall and Bar Hill on the Antonine Wall (Symonds 2018).

Figure 6. Trajan performing the sacrifice of a bull by the finished Danube bridge at Drobeta as depicted on Trajan's Column in Rome (Cichorius Scene 99; photograph by Klaus Anger, D-DAI-ROM89.573).


Figure 7. The findspot of the Bridgeness Distance Slab according to Macdonald's description (1934: 103) on LIDAR imagery, with the line of the Antonine Wall as reconstructed by Historic Environment Scotland.

Such acts of 'desacralization' were probably deemed necessary as the inscriptions were dedicated to the emperor as representative of Iupiter on earth.

Based on negative results with trial trenching and antiquarian reports about the easternmost traces of the Antonine Wall, Bailey and Devereux have suggested that the Bridgeness Distance Slab may have been brought to its findspot in post-Roman times (1987). However, its very large size in relation to the meagre thickness of the stone doesn't seem readily to lend itself for reuse as a structural element. Surely, the large slab would have been smashed into smaller pieces to be carried to the place of reuse. But the strongest argument against a post-Roman displacement is the findspot itself: if the stone was reused and displaced, would it not be a surprising coincidence that it ended up on a site that seems preordained by nature to serve as a podium for a monument? So, the Bridgeness Distance Slab was almost certainly found in its original location. The site for commemorating the building activities, a promontory, seems to have been carefully chosen based on visibility.

There are two possibilities. The Bridgeness Distance Slab may have been set up as part of a self-contained monument, detached from the Antonine Wall. We may compare the monument, a possible *tropaeum*, at Rose Hill, slightly north of Hadrian's Wall, a conspicuous knoll on the watershed between Tyne and Irthing (Breeze 2014). The Rose Hill slab has a domed temple? on it, remarkably similar to the antiquarian picture of Arthur's O'on, which was situated north of Camelon, at a conspicuous site visible to all who approached the (suspected) harbour at Camelon. In this scenario, the Antonine Wall could well have extended further east, to Carriden, for which there is support in several antiquarian reports (Bailey and Devereux 1987: 98-9, 101). However, no archaeological evidence has been found for such a continuation, and there is no sign of the ditch visible on LiDAR between Bo'ness and Carriden although there are several fields on the expected line that should have preserved traces of it.

The other possibility, the dominant view since Macdonald, is that the Bridgeness Distance Slab marked the eastern terminus of the Antonine Wall, the final leg of which was then routed to the promontory for its visual prominence, resulting in a *tropaeum* like the one proposed for the eastern terminus of Hadrian's Wall at Wallsend (Bidwell 2015). The fact that the Bridgeness Distance Slab has cramp holes on its back side, like all but five of the Distance Slabs, would seem to point to a similar physical integration in the body of the Antonine Wall. The ditch linking the find-spot of the Distance Slab with the Wall to the south-west has been sought on several occasions but in vain. Could the soldiers have been defeated by the bedrock in those final metres?

## Conclusions

The Distance Slabs record, in meticulous detail, the feat of building the Antonine Wall. Borrowing from a pool of established imperial imagery, they celebrate the recent success of the Roman army in advancing the eagle (Breeze and Ferris 2016). With its record of 4652 paces, the Bridgeness stone is clearly part of this series. But it is also exceptional, both in size and richness of the imagery. Our iconographical analysis lends support to Wheeler's earlier suggestion (2009: 242) that the right-hand scene on the Bridgeness Distance Slab records the sacrifice undertaken by the commanding officer of the Second Legion to mark the act of building the Antonine Wall. As the stone was erected at the east end of the frontier it may even have marked the end of the building programme, which followed the successful campaigning recorded in the left-hand panel. With the horseman clearly recognisable as the emperor himself, this scene also honours Antoninus Pius in ordering the advance into southern Scotland and supervising the military operation from his palace in Rome (Fronto, *Panegyrici Latinae* 8 (55) 14.2).

Following Mark Hassall, we accept that the building of the eastern sector of the frontier did not occur until the second or even third season, pushing the date of the erection of the Bridgeness Distance Slab to 144 CE, 145 CE or even later. The image of the legate of the Second Legion on the stone, emphasised by the legion's name on a flag immediately behind him, appears to confirm that the legion was present in strength while the other two legions were only represented by detachments. This implies that the legate of the Second Legion was the most senior officer present and therefore likely to have been in command of the whole building programme for the Antonine Wall. He was not Aulus Claudius Charax, the commander of the legion during the campaigning, but an unknown successor.

## Abbreviations

*AE* *L'Année* épigraphique.

*RIB* Collingwood, R.G. and R.P. Wright 1965. *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, I: *Inscriptions on Stone*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

*RIC* II Mattingly, H. and E.A. Sydenham 1926. *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, II, *Vespasian to Hadrian*, reprint 1962. London: Spink.

*RIC* II.1 Carradice, I.A. and T.V. Buttrey, 2007. *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, II.1, *From AD 69-96. Vespasian to Domitian*. London: Spink.

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# Tracing the Life of a Dipinto: A Revision of the Iarhibol Dipinto from the Military Clerical Office in Dura-Europos

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## Introduction

In 1943, Michael Rostovtzeff, one of the former directors of Yale's excavations at Dura-Europos, published an article on Shapur I's trilingual inscription on the Ka'baye Zerdosht (ŠKZ) at Naqs-e Rustam (Pars), then called *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, after Augustus' famous testimony to his own achievements.[1] Based on the reference to Dura-Europos in this inscription, which lists Shapur's victories over the Romans in three successive military campaigns in the 40s and 50s of the third century, Rostovtzeff was the first to suggest that Dura-Europos had been briefly occupied by the Sasanians in 252/3 CE, during Shapur's second Syrian campaign, before being finally conquered by the Sasanians around 256/7 CE.[2] Rostovtzeff supported his hypothesis, which he presented as highly hypothetical,[3] with a number of archaeological finds from Dura: six coin hoards, a Sasanian mural depicting a battle between Sasanians and Romans from the diwan of House F in Block C 7, and a dipinto depicting a Roman officer sacrificing to the Palmyrene god Iarhibol in the presence of a horseman in Iranian dress. The latter was found in room W 14 of the military complex next to the temple of Azzanathkona in Block E 7, which was buried in the earthworks built in 254.[4] Rostovtzeff identified the anonymous horseman as the Palmyrene ruler Odaenathus, attending a sacrifice in honour of his supposed victory over the Sasanians and the liberation of Dura in 254 CE. Although presented with the utmost caution, Rostovtzeff's thesis of an early Sasanian occupation of Dura became generally accepted with little or no comments in subsequent research.[5]

In his first academic paper on Dura-Europos, published in *Chiron* in 1985, Simon James reassesses the last years of the city's existence and concludes that there is no conclusive archaeological evidence to support Rostovtzeff's thesis that the city had been occupied by the Sasanians shortly before its final demise.[6] It is characteristic of James's scholarly open-mindedness and flexibility that he gradually changed his mind on this matter. In his doctoral dissertation, published in 2004, he still considers the archaeological evidence presented by Rostovtzeff to be 'totally spurious', but following Frantz Grenet's re-interpretation of the Pehlevi dipinti from the Dura synagogue and three fragmentary Iranian documents allegedly found in the embankment, he concludes that there must have been a relatively brief Sasanian occupation of Dura in 253 CE, before the final siege.[7] In his 2019 publication of the military base, James returns to the topic once more, concluding that although the evidence remains ambiguous, historical, archaeological, epigraphic and papyrological evidence suggests that Dura was probably taken twice by the Sasanians, a view held by most historians today.[8]

The first occupation was in 253/4 CE during Shapur's massive and devastating raid into Syria for glory, booty, and prisoners. Although much is still unclear about the exact sequence of events, it seems that the Sasanians were able to take Dura without a siege because it had been largely abandoned by both its local inhabitants

[1] The idea for this article was born in Irvine, USA, while attending a conference on the Iranian god Mithra in the spring of 2023. When I showed the Iarhibol-dipinto, which is the subject of this article, Touraj Daryaee and Matthew Canepa immediately noticed the tassels on the horse and commented on their Sasanian character. I am grateful to them for sharing this with me and providing the inspiration for this research. I would like to thank Ilaria Bucci and Patryk Skupniewicz for their help with the graffiti and the armour respectively. Mark de Kreij confirmed the reading of a mysterious dipinto for me. I am, of course, solely responsible for the views expressed in this article. The inscription dates to 262 CE, and is in Middle Persian, Parthian and Greek. Cf. Daryaee 2018.

[2] Rostovtzeff 1943: 52-60. The capture of Dura-Europos had been established in 256 (based on a coin find), whereas Shapur's second campaign mentioned in the inscriptions must have been before 254 CE. Rostovtzeff tried to reconcile this by assuming that Dura had been captured twice. The date of the ultimate fall of the city to the Sasanians is now considered to be less definitive than in Rostovtzeff's days, but may be 256/7. Cf. Baird 2012, 310.

[3] Rostovtzeff 1943: 52.

[4] James 2019: fig. 5.6, for a plan of the temple, indicating the foot of the embankment, and showing that part of W 16 and W 15, as well as the whole of W 13, 14 and 15 that were covered by it: idem, *op.cit.,* 78.

[5] MacDonald 1986: 50, n. 20, list numerous examples.

[6] James 1985: 116: 'This painting, like the Sasanian mural, provides no remotely credible support for Rostovtzeff's thesis.' Almost simultaneously and independently, David MacDonald published a study on the same topic, in which he arrived at very similar conclusions: MacDonald 1986.

[7] James 2004: esp. 23.

[8] James 2019: 36-37. Partly based on archaeological research conducted by Jen Baird in the houses (2012 and 2014), that showed that quite of few of these had been abandoned by their inhabitants long before the final siege. Cf. Edwell 2008: 89-90 and idem, 2021: 98-100, who voices the current *communis opinio*. An exception is Leriche *et al.* 2011: 27.

and the Roman soldiers. When and why the Sasanians left is not clear, but Dura must have been back in Roman hands by 254 CE.[9] Likely, Dura's civilian population did not return, and it was only the Roman military and their families who ended up living in the city, reinforcing the fortifications in 254 CE.[10] Hence Dura died a complex and prolonged death, as Jen Baird so aptly showed in her excellent analysis of the last years of the city.[11]

In this article written for my long-time friend, fellow Durene and indispensable advisor on all things military, I want to return to one of Rostostovtzeff's arguments for an early Sasanian occupation, the dipinto depicting Iarhibol, a Roman officer and a horseman, from room W 14 in the former courtyard of the temple of Azzanathkona. Although I agree with James's judgement that Rostovtzeff's identification of the horseman as Odaenathus was mere conjecture, I hope to show that this dipinto can nevertheless be used to substantiate the temporary Sasanian occupation in 253/4 CE. Although it will not provide us with irrefutable evidence for such an occupation, it does make the reconstruction more likely. My re-assessment of this dipinto is based on iconographic evidence and new insights into the nature and function of graffiti. In such a new approach, graffiti are treated less as texts or images and more as material objects.[12] This means that their content is no longer the sole centre of attention, and that notions of contexts, materiality and duration are also considered. I will begin with the context of the dipinto, continue with a description and a discussion of its iconography and then turn to its materiality and duration.

## Context

The dipinto was found in room W 14, one of the rooms in the rear area of the courtyard of the Temple of Azzonathkona, located in the northern part of Block E 7, in the northern part of the city, the area that was extensively used by the Roman military from about 180 CE (Figure 1).[13] As James pointed out in his recent re-evaluation and analysis of the Roman military base, this military use did not interfere with the traditional use of the temple, which at some point was separated from the rear area by a wall. The military compound was entered by a separate entrance added to the rear of the complex, which gave access to the courtyard via W 15. On entering the courtyard, W 14, with its open southern side, was to the left of the visitor. This room, which had benches attached to its east and north walls, gave access to room W 13, where the famous cache of papyri of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* was found. The

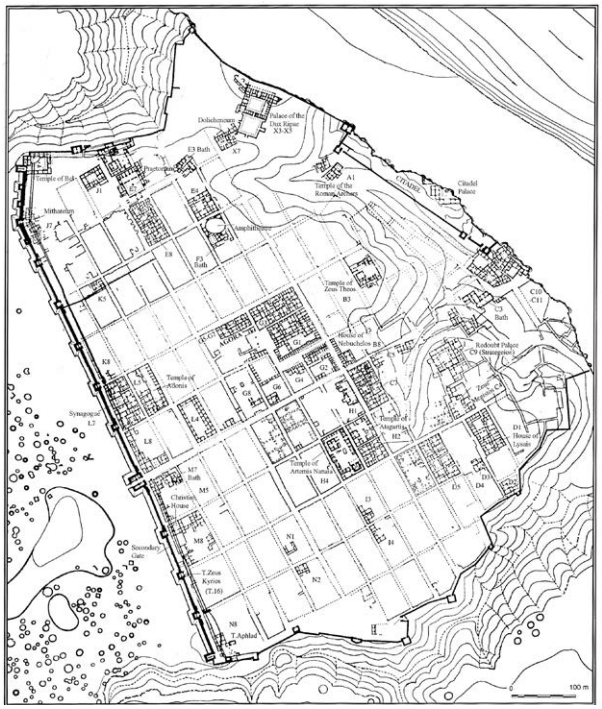

Figure 1. Ground plan of the northern part of Dura-Europos within Block E 7 the temple of Azzanathkona with room W 14. After Detweiler.

walls of W 14 were literally covered with heterogeneous texts and images that were either scratched or made in ink. These graffiti are mainly of a military nature. The unusual amount of ink drawings, combined with the good lighting and ink stains on the wall, led the excavators to believe that this was the office of military scribes, presumably of auxiliary units such as the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*.[14] This fits well with the military papyri found in W 13. The military complex is adjacent to the *principium*, located in the southern part of block E 7, and James suggests that after 211 CE it may have been an administrative annex to the *principium*.[15] It is not clear exactly when the garrison confiscated this part of the temple for their use. The dipinti and graffiti are difficult to date precisely and were undoubtedly added over time.[16] A *terminus ante quem* of 254 CE is provided by the construction of the rampart.

[9] The key piece of evidence is *P. Dura* 32.
[10] Baird 2014: 115.
[11] Baird 2012 and idem 2020. Cf. the reconstruction recently proposed by Edwell 2021: 105.
[12] A major source of inspiration was Baird 2018.
[13] James 2019: 70-78.
[14] Hopkins in PR 5: 135.
[15] James 2019: 76. Alternatively, James suggests it may have been the aedes of the military standards. I prefer the scribal office, for reasons listed above. Although standards indeed figure frequently in the graffiti and dipinti, we also encounter numerous other religious motives and other topics. Pictorial graffiti – particularly frequent in this room- are also more at home in a non-religious context in Dura: Baird 2011.
[16] Goldman 1985: 291 dates the dipinto around 239 CE, assuming it is contemporaneous with the Julius Terentius painting. If my interpretation proposed below is correct, the horseman dates to 253/4 CE. The remainder of the scene must have been painted earlier, at some point in the first half of the third century.

Figure 2. Field photograph of the dipinto made just after its discovery in 1932. Courtesy YUAG.

The dipinto of Iarhibol with the Roman officer and cavalryman measures 0.38.5 x 0.79 metres and was found in the middle of the west wall next to the door leading into Room W 13 (Figure 2).[17] It is not clear at what height the drawing was placed but given the prominent dimensions of the scene it was probably at eye level. The figures thought to belong to this scene overlap and are surrounded by other dipinti and graffiti, only some of which have been published. The scene currently on display in the Yale University Art Gallery (YUAG), is best known from two drawings; the most detailed was made by A.E. Schmalz, who made important observations on technical aspects and the condition of the painting, which are quoted in full by Rostovtzeff in a footnote to his 1935 publication on Parthian art.[18] The figures were drawn in ink directly with a brush on hard plaster. Schmalz describes quite a few remnants of earlier scratches and drawings, deliberate damage and rubbing in the scene itself, and notes differences in the intensity of the ink. The following description is largely based on his observations, combined with a study of the ancient photographs taken in the field and a study of the original, now on display in the YUAG (1932.1208).[19]

In the centre stands a cult statue on a three-stepped podium with Greek inscriptions done by a professional hand, identifying the god as Iarhibol.[20] The god has a nimbus and radiant crown and is dressed as a 'tribune' once, probably Roman general, in keeping with the usual costume of this Palmyrene god.[21] His face is destroyed. In his raised right hand is a sceptre crowned with branches, and in his lowered left hand a globe. To the left of his leg is an inscription in very cursive Greek, hardy readable.[22] On the floor to his right a Roman officer with a short beard and moustache stands facing front. He is identified by the name above his head as Heliodorus. His left hand rests on the hilt of his sword, whereas his right hand reaches across his body and drops incense on the thymiaterion, standing to his left. He wears a long-sleeved, knee-length tunic with fringed hem, a cloak, a waistband, a baldric, and high boots. There are cross symbols on the thighs of the tunic.[23] Behind him on the same level stands a much smaller, badly damaged figure, dressed in a knee-length tunic. He holds a palm branch in his right hand, and an unidentifiable object in his left hand. Above Heliodorus, an eagle with a wreath in its beak flies towards the god. To the right of the god, at a higher level and on a smaller scale, another male figure faces the statue,

[17] Hopkins, PR 5: 153. Cf. the tentative reconstruction of the most important graffiti on the walls of E 7- W 14 in James 2019: 77, fig. 5.10.
[18] Rostovtzeff 1935: 251-252, n. 127. A cleaned-up version of Schmalz's drawing was published in PR 5: pl. XXXVI, 3.
[19] https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/34186 for an excellent picture of the dipinto in its present state, that allows the viewer to zoom in.
[20] PR 5: 155 (inscription 473).
[21] On the iconography of Iarhibol, see Linant de Bellefonds 1990.
[22] PR 5: 155. Welles suggested the reading ἔτους ἐπὶ ὑπάτων τῶν κυρίων ἡμῶν which will have been followed by the names of two consuls. Mark de Kreij was able to confirm this reading, for which I am very grateful.
[23] James 2004: 65 on the meaning of such symbols.

with his lowered right hand dropping incense on the thymiaterion placed before him. He is identified by the Greek inscription above his head as Artemidoros σημιαφορος (the standard bearer). To his right, a figure of Victory standing on a globe flies towards the god, holding a wreath in her outstretched right hand and a palm branch in her lowered left hand.

Behind Heliodorus, above and partly overlapping with the small figure, a man on horseback rides up towards the god. The man and horse are rendered in a slightly smaller scale than Heliodorus and Iarhibol. The head and right shoulder are missing. The rider wears a long-sleeved embroidered tunic reaching to his knees, and Parthian trousers with embroidery down the front, tucked into boots. A cloak is attached on his right shoulder, the end of which can be seen floating behind his back.[24] A round shield is attached to his left shoulder. The rider's right hand is extended along the horse's neck, possibly holding an object. The large quiver is probably attached to the back of the saddle, not visible in the drawing. The horse is shown walking, with its left foreleg bent. There is an aigrette on the horse's head, the mane is short, and the tail is partly wrapped. The horse is fully harnessed, with a snaffle bit with shanks, a large phaleron on its shoulder, decorative triple strands behind the large quiver, and large melon-shaped tassels attached to the (invisible) saddle, which rest on an animal skin; one tassel is suspended in the air behind the horse, and the other is visible between its hind legs. Below the foreleg, barely visible, are three rows of small circles. To the right of the left fore foot of the horse is the letter M. There are also several traces of intruding graffiti and traces of paint.

The ink painting was executed by a skilled hand and has been much discussed in the literature since its discovery in 1932.[25] Most interpreters agree that this painting was designed as a single representation.[26] With the exception of the horseman, the interpretation of the image posed few problems and has been identified as a Roman officer sacrificing to the Palmyrene god Iarhibol.[27] It has been rightly compared in the past to the painting depicting the sacrifice of the tribune Julius Terentius, from the nearby Temple of Bel, who, accompanied by his men, sacrifices to three Palmyrene gods, including Iarhibol.[28] Heliodorus is clearly not a tribune, but an officer of lower rank, who probably also belonged to the twentieth Palmyrene cohort.[29]

Scholars have had more difficulty in identifying the rider. So far, there are two possible interpretations. Rostovtzeff identifies the rider as an oriental-looking general. Arguing that the horseman dominates the scene, he suggests that the Roman officer is sacrificing to Iarhibol to celebrate the victory of the troops under the command of this general. Rostovtzeff points to the Parthian-Sasanian character of both the clothing of the rider and the horse's equipment, arguing that both had been adopted by the Palmyrenes and were common in Palmyra. The Palmyrene ruler Odaenathus (c. 220-267) was the only Oriental general ever to command the Roman army in Syria, and thus Rostovtzeff identifies him as such. Since the room in which the dipinto was found was buried by the embankment, this victory must have taken place before 254, leading to the hypothesis that the scene illustrates the celebration of the liberation of Dura after the first Sasanian occupation.[30] Although not all have accepted Rostovtzeff's rather bold interpretation, not many have proposed an alternative explanation.[31] The most important is that of Bernard Goldman, who, inspired by a graffito from Abu Duhur in the Palmyrena, interprets the horseman as a Palmyrene rider god.[32] In what follows, I first evaluate both possibilities on historical and iconographic grounds and then propose a different approach.

## Iconography

Rostovtzeff's identification of the horseman as Odaenathus is impossible, both for historical and iconographic reasons. As Udo Hartmann pointed out, there is not sufficient evidence that Odaenathus was already involved with the Sasanians at this early date.[33] It was only in 260, after the defeat of the Roman

[24] Mistakenly identified by Hopkins, PR 5: 154 as the ends of the ribbon of his diadem.

[25] Hopkins, PR 5: 152-156, pl. XXXVI, 1-3; Rostovtzeff 1935: 249-252; Rostovtzeff 1943: 58-59, fig. 2; Goldman 1985; Goldman 1993; James 1985: 116; MacDonald 1986: fig. 2, 61; Dirven 1999: 186, 316-318, pl. 14 (photograph); Goldman 1999: 67-68, F2; James 2004: 39-40, fig. 21; Brody and Hoffmann 2011: 213, fig. 12.5. James 2019: 77, fig. 5.10.

[26] Schmalz emphasises in his description that the scene changed over time. Among later researchers, only MacDonald 1986: 61 stressed the scene was updated on at least two occasions.

[27] An important Palmyrene god, that was particularly popular among soldiers: Dirven 1999: 181-188.

[28] For recent publications, see Kaizer 2006, Dirven 2007, James 2004: 39, 57-66, fig. 19, pl. 1-2 For an excellent picture see: https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/4961

[29] Hopkins PR 5: 155 calls him 'tribune' once. Probably a slip of the pen. Julius Terentius wears a white *paludamentum* with red fringes, characteristic of his high rank: James 2004: 65. Although the tunic of the figure in the dipinto is fringed, his cloak is not. James points out that the marks on the tunic possibly refer to the person's rank.

[30] Initially, Rostovtzeff suggested that this illustrated Odaenathus' great victory over Shapur, soon after the capture of Valerian and Shapur's invasion of Syria. This was accepted by Alföldi 1938: 77. However, these events took place in 260-1 CE, after the construction of the embankment and the final capture of Dura, and so Rostovtzeff 1943: 58 claims that it was the liberation of 253 CE that is depicted here.

[31] Hopkins, PR 5: 154 is cautious and remarks Rostovtzeff's identification as Odaenathus is possible. James 1985: 116 downright rejects the possibility and MacDonald 1986: 61 opts for a local notable. In my former publication of the scene, Dirven 1999: 316-318, I rejected Rostovtzeff's identification and opted for a Palmyrene noble instead.

[32] Goldman 1985: 288-290. Grenet 1988: 142 agrees with Rostovtzeff's historical reconstruction of an early Sasanian occupation but rejects his identification of the horseman as Odaenathus. He opts instead for a Palmyrene rider god.

[33] Hartmann 2001: 100 with extensive references in the footnotes.

Figure 3. Floor mosaic from Palmyra depicting a Palmyrene general (possibly Septimius Herodianus) killing a tiger. Courtesy Marta Zuchowska.

emperor Valerian, that Odaenathus took up arms against the Persians. And only after his Persian victory in the second half of the year 263 CE, did he and his son Septimius Herodianus adopt the title King of Kings, following Iranian custom.[34] Hence it is most unlikely that Odaenathus liberated Dura, let alone that he adopted Sasanian regalia or iconographic motives to express his superiority over the Sasanians at the early 50s of the third century.

This brings me to the so-called Parthian or Sasanian elements that the Palmyrenes are said to have adopted; the horseman's dress and the horse's trappings. It is indeed the case that many Iranian cultural elements can be found in both Palmyra and Dura-Europos. Dura-Europos was part of the Arsacid Commonwealth until it was conquered by the Romans in about 165 CE, and both Palmyra and Dura-Europos were located in the frontier zone between the great empires, where contact and cultural exchange were frequent.[35] These contacts gave rise to a distinctive 'interculture', an intersection between the main cultures, with many Iranian and Greco-Roman elements integrated into a culture that can best be described as new and distinctive.[36] Initially, Palmyra's and Dura-Europos's contacts with their eastern neighbours were predominantly peaceful and driven by commercial interests, but from the 220s, when the Sassanians took over, relations deteriorated. It is well known, however, that mutual influences can be particularly strong in times of military conflict, leading to competition and innovation, both military and culturally.[37] It is therefore reasonable to assume that certain Sasanian elements were adopted in addition to earlier Arsacid influences. However, the situation is particularly complicated in the early years of Sasanian rule, as we can rule out a cultural break between the Arsacid and Sasanian rulers, who only gradually developed their cultural identity. As a result, it is often difficult to distinguish between Arsacid and Sasanian elements in monuments dated to the early third century.[38] This holds particularly true for local Palmyrene and Durene dress inspired by Arsacid and Sasanian clothing.[39]

The trouser-suit consisting of a round-necked, long-sleeved belted tunic falling just above the knees, long trousers with a cloak fastened on the shoulder, was common in both Palmyra and Dura, and was worn by deities and mortals alike.[40] The combination of the so-called Parthian costume with a chlamys is especially popular among cavalry and camelry in Palmyra,[41] and

[34] Hartmann 2024: 148-150.
[35] Goldman 1985: 291-292; idem 1999: 21, note 11. On the Parthian Commonwealth, see De Jong 2013.
[36] Burke 2007: 72-77. Recently, Dirven 2022 on the composite character of Palmyrene culture.
[37] James 2004: 247-251.
[38] Of course, in their official monuments the Sasanians sought to distinguish themselves from their predecessors (cf. Canepa 2010), but this should not blind us to the continuity in every daily life and at other levels of society.
[39] Goldman 1993, 203-205.
[40] On the costume in general: Sarkosh-Curtis 2017. Including later Sasanian variations: Goldman 1993
[41] On this dress with Palmyrene cavalry, Albertson 2000.

is also frequently found among the so-called rider gods of the desert. [42] This costume is usually less ornate than the embroidered costume of the horseman in the dipinto under discussion. As a rule, Palmyrene rider gods are also more heavily armed.[43] In view of this, the identification of the horseman as a Palmyrene god, proposed by Goldman and Grenet, is not likely.[44] This is confirmed by his awkward and anomalous placement. In sacrificial scenes depicting rider gods, worshippers unexceptionally face the gods and do not turn their back on them.

Although the trouser suit was common among Palmyrene cavalry and camelry, Palmyra's elite combined tunic and trousers with the *kandys* when associated with horses, not with the cloak worn by the rider in the dipinto.[45] The *kandys* is also worn by Mordecai when he rides the white horse of the Persian king in the panel of the synagogue paintings at Dura-Europos, confirming the high status of this garment.[46] Given Rostovtzeff's identification of the rider in the dipinto as Odaenathus, two mosaics recently discovered in Palmyra depicting armed horsemen are of particular interest, as they are generally thought to represent Odaenathus and his son Septimius Herodianus.[47] Like their elite Palmyrene counterparts, both royal figures are shown wearing the *kandys* over knee-length tunics and trousers, thus deviating from the horseman discussed here. Interestingly, the two mosaics are clearly influenced by Sasanian conventions, testifying to cultural appropriation by the Palmyrenes. One of the horsemen is depicted with two tigers: one leaping at him and the other lying on the ground, defeated (Figure 3). According to Sasanian pictorial conventions, they are certainly the same animal.[48] On the other hand, there are elements in these mosaics that intentionally deviate from contemporary Sasanian conventions and are local. In particular, the helmet of both figures has nothing to do with the usual Sasanian royal or military headgear. In this period, it is mainly the headgear that is the distinguishing feature of figures and an expression of local or social identity. So, it is unfortunate (and perhaps telling) that the head of the horseman in our dipinto is missing. However, enough remains to establish that his costume was not typically Palmyrene. Given the missing *kandys*, an identification of the rider as Odaenathus or an anonymous Palmyrene general or nobleman is not likely.

The rider's attire consisting of embroidered tunic, rather tight trousers and cloak is common among the Arsacid military during the early centuries of the Common Era. Examples are particularly common in statues from Hatra and other cities in northern Mesopotamia.[49] Goldman points out that the trousered suit of the Arsacid era at first remained in vogue under the Sasanians, and only gradually changed to become characteristic of the Sasanian era.[50] Graffiti from the Harem of Xerxes and the *tachara* of Darius I in Persepolis (212-218 CE), depicting the first Sasanian rulers, continue the clothing styles inherited from the Parthian era,[51] while fashion has changed in the rock reliefs of Ardashir.[52] Of particular note are the loose trousers, which fall in vertical folds and are no longer tied at the ankles. We find similar trousers in the mural depicting a battle between Sasanians and Romans, uncovered in the diwan of House F in Block C 7 at Dura-Europos.[53] However, it is by no means clear how widespread this new fashion was at this early date. Also, from Dura-Europos is a graffito, found in the so-called Temple of Bel in the northern part of the city, of a high-ranking military commander dressed in a tight-fitting costume similar to that of the horseman depicted on the dipinto in the nearby temple of Azzanathkona. Given the Partho-Sasanian helmet, coiffure and clothing, Goldman identified the enthroned figure as a high-ranking Sasanian visitor.[54] Unfortunately, the drawing is not dated, but the clothing and rank of this figure are reminiscent of the horseman in the dipinto.

While the origin of the rider's clothing remains ambivalent and could be Parthian, Sasanian or local,

[42] On rider gods in the Palmyrena, recently Kaizer 2022. Cf. Drijvers 1976, pls. LXII-LXII.

[43] Still fundamental: Seyrig 1971.

[44] Above, n.32. The Sasanian tassels discussed below of course also contradict the identification as a Palmyrene deity.

[45] Sarkosh-Curtis 2017: 64-65. Raja and Seland 2020: S29. Here, the servants are pictured wearing the tunic and trousers, without *kandys* or cloak.

[46] Kraeling 1956: pl. LXIV. Note Mordecai's dress is identical to that of king Ahuseverus in the same panel. Pharaoh in the panel depicting the infancy of Moses also wears the kandys (idem, pl. LXVIII). Note that people of lower rank in the synagogue paintings are wearing tunic and trousers only. In the sculptures of Hatra, the *kandys* is likewise confined to the king: Dirven 2008: 220-223. Riders are common in graffiti from Dura, but their outfits are usually (drawn) more basic, and both kandys and cloak are missing: Goldman 1999: 25-40.

[47] Gawlikowski and Zuchowska 2010.

[48] Skupniewicz 2020.

[49] Dirven 2008: 226-227 on statues of military in Hatra, and Blömer 2022, esp. figs. 12.4-5 on greater North Mesopotamia.

[50] Goldman 1993: 201. On the Sasanian costume: Skupniewicz 2020.

[51] Callieri 2003. Canepa 2010: 571, rightly stresses that by making these pictorial graffiti, the early Sasanians claimed Persepolis for the dynasty.

[52] The reliefs at Naqsh-i Rustam, Naqsh-i Rajab and Salmas. Cf. Goldman 1993: 207.

[53] Goldman and Little 1980: 283-298, esp. 290. Cf. below, note 61.

[54] Cumont 1926: 267-270, pl. 99.2, who notes the continuity between Parthian and Sasanian in the rider's costume, but interprets the headdress as the Parthian tiara and thus the figure as a 'roi perse'. Cf. Goldman 1990: 20-22; Goldman 1999: 42, no. C.6, who interprets the headdress as a segmented helmet (Spangenhelm) instead. On Partho-Sasanian helmets and the Sasanian specimen found at Dura: James 1986. Although the helmet does resemble the Parthian royal tiara and the two are easily confused in pictorial representations or sculptures, there are subtle differences (note especially the helmet's missing ear- and neck pieces). The helmet depicted in the graffito is similar to the helmet worn by the military in statues from Hatra, for example Safar and Mustafa 1974: fig. 28 (life size statue) and Venco-Ricciardi 2015: fig. 23 (stone from the arch of iwan 9, of the big northern iwan).

his horse's equipment gives a clear indication of his identity. Although Rostovtzeff calls these trappings typically Palmyrene, several elements are never attested in Palmyra and are rare or unaccounted for in Dura.[55] The great phalerae typical of Parthian and Sasanian horse trappings are indeed common in Palmyra and Dura. The banded or covered horse tail, known from both Parthian and Sasanian examples,[56] is attested several times in Dura, but it is unaccounted for in Palmyra.[57] The above-mentioned Palmyrene mosaics, probably depicting Odaenathus and his son Septimius Herodianus, show their horses with their tails hanging free and their manes long, in line with what is known of Palmyrene customs.[58]

Unaccounted for in both Palmyra and Dura, and first attested only in Sasanian representations, are the horse's forelock that is drawn up in a bun above the head, and the large melon shaped tassels that are attached to the saddle of the horse.[59] Both elements are not known among the Arsacids and are first attested in early Sasanian graffiti from Persepolis representing the first Sasanian kings.[60] These graffiti strongly suggest that the tassels and the aigrette have their origins in the traditions of Pars, and were taken along and transformed into attributes typical of the Sasanian dynasty.[61] Dan Potts and many others before him who have studied the tassels have argued that such tassels are typical of Sasanian royalty or deities.[62] In the rock relief of Naqsh-e Rostam (226-242), for example, tassels are attached to both the horse of Ardashir I and Ahuramazda.[63] The aigrette above the horse's head is also typical of early Sasanian reliefs and silver vessels.[64]

We can conclude that the horseman in the graffito not only looks like an oriental general, but represents a Sasanian general or deity. I find the identification of the rider as a god unlikely in view of the absence of Sasanian worshippers, but admittedly this possibility cannot be excluded. Alternatively, we are dealing with Sasanian royalty or high officials. It is tempting to identify the horseman as Shapur, depicted upon entering the conquered city. This is particularly attractive in the light of the transport order from Shapur himself that was found at Dura (*P. Dura* 153-154), supposedly under the rampart, which suggests that these documents date from before the final siege.[65] But it may be better to be more cautious and opt for an anonymous Sasanian general instead; almost all surviving representations depict Sasanian kings or princes, and we should not rule out the possibility that other high-ranking officials were depicted with the same badges of honour.[66] Furthermore, the dress of the horseman in the dipinto is not at all like the rich and lavish dress of the Sasanian kings (although it is unlikely that they went to war in such an outfit, and there may have been more continuity in their everyday dress than official documents suggest). Again, it is very unfortunate that the rider's head is lost; no doubt hairstyle and headgear would have been important clues to his identification.

## Materiality

In his discussion of the dipinto, Rostovtzeff raises the possibility that the horseman is a Sasanian king, but he immediately dismisses this possibility, arguing that it is impossible for a Sasanian king to have sacrificed to a

[55] Rostovtzeff 1943: 58. Rostovtzeff's 1935: 151 claims that the Palmyrenes also adopted the large balloon-like pendants but he quotes no examples. Rostovtzeff is followed by Harper 1981: 51, n. 66, as well as Potts 2022: 10. Cf. below, note 63.

[56] Ilyarov 2003: 267-268 (Parthian examples) and 269 (Sasanian instances). Although the Sasanians arrange horsetails in a variety of ways, they do not use covers of a hard material, like the Parthians, but instead wrap the tails in ribbons, braid them or tie them up with ribbons.

[57] Examples from Dura are the horse in the painting from the iwan in House L 7 (PR 6: 151-153, Dirven 1999: 291-292, pl. XI), and Mithras the hunter (Dirven 2016). In this instance, a cover and a tightly wrapped tail are combined. A third instance is the hunter on the same wall as our dipinto: PR 5: 157-158, pl. 35.4 (=Goldman 1999: B.1a,b). According to Ilyasov 2003: 267-268 these are remnants from Parthian times, a hypothesis impossible to prove since all instances are dated to the Roman period.

[58] Above, note 48. Raja and Seeland 2020, assemble all Palmyrene reliefs and tesserae depicting horses (they omit the mosaics though). None of the 36 Palmyrene depictions listed in the catalogue have tassels or aigrettes.

[59] Hopkins, PR 5: 154 already notes these two elements are Sasanian.

[60] Contra Goldman and Little 1980: 289 who conclude from the dipinto that is the topic of this article, that the Sasanian ornament developed from a much smaller Parthian model. In turn, they follow Harper 1981: n. 66, who quotes Rostovtzeff's study on Parthian art (Rostovtzeff 1935: 251, figs. 57 and 78). They are followed by Potts 2022: 10, despite his remark that the tassels are unaccounted for in Arsacid rupestrian reliefs. A second instance from Dura has been identified below a horse in the Sasanian painting from House F in Block C 7. The painting is attributed to a Sasanian painter, working in Dura during the short Sasanian occupation in 253-4 and hence does not testify to the use of tassels in an earlier period (PR 4: 182-199. Cf. Goldman and Little 1980: 289-291). A third possible example is a dipinto on a pot sherd from block N8, room W8, picturing a mounted archer (PR 7-8: 383-384, pl. LVI, 2 (YUAG 1969)). This instance is not dated. It should be stressed that graffiti depicting horsemen are numerous in Dura (Goldman 1999: 21-40), and that none of these horses has tassels or an aigrette. Since I argue in this article that the horseman in the dipinto was also painted by a Sasanian hand, there is no longer any reason to argue for an Arsacid origin of the tassels.

[61] Callieri 2003. On the history of the tassels previous to their arrival in Pars, see Ilyasov 2003. Tassels and aigrette are not isolated instances of this phenomenon. On the role of traditions from the province of Pars in the creation of a Sasanian identity, see Canepa 2010.

[62] Potts 2022, with extensive references to previous publications.

[63] Potts 2022: fig. 3. The forelocks of the horses are invisible, since their heads touch. However, ribbons suggest the horses' forelocks were bound up.

[64] The rock relief picturing the triumph of Shapur over Valerian at Naqsh-e Rostam, tie up the forelock of the horse. This is also seen in the equestrian battle relief of Ardashr I at Firuzbad, the equestrian battle relief of Bahram II at Naqsh-e Rostam (276-293), as well as Hormizd II. Cf. Harper 1981: 51 for the same device in early Sasanian silver vessels, and Shapur's horse on the so-called Shapur cameo.

[65] Grenet 1988: 136, with note 16. Cf. Welles 1959: 415-417.

[66] This much is suggested by the equestrian relief of Firuzbad depicting three stages in Ardashir's battle with the Parthian king Artabanus IV in 224. The first figure on the left is not a royal and rides a horse with large tassels. He is interpreted as a page by Von Gall 1990: 53.

Palmyrene deity.[67] Thus, he assumes that the horseman is part of the sacrificial scene, that was created in one go. However, there are very good reasons to think that this is not the case and that different elements of the painting were created and adapted at different times by different people, ultimately radically changing the meaning of the dipinto. Such a dynamic conception of the representation fits much better with the fact that we are dealing with a pictorial graffito, an unofficial representation that allows and even invites the viewer to react to it.[68] The relatively skilled hand with which most of the figures in this dipinto were painted undoubtedly contributed to the fact that it was seen less as a graffito than as a painting, a designed representation. The neat drawings of this archaeological object, which have normally been used in publications as illustration, have also contributed to this suggestion. But as Jen Baird and Claire Taylor have rightly pointed out, graffiti are not necessarily defined by their content or subject, nor by their surface, nor by their techniques or qualities of representation. Instead, Baird and Taylor emphasise the performative aspect of graffiti that results in the creation of a material object. If we focus on the materiality of the representation, it becomes possible to distinguish the different stages in its life.[69] Colour gradations in the ink, the erasure and overwriting of previous figures or names, are all part of the graffito as an object. In the reconstruction drawings, however, such elements do not show. The drawing thus distorts the dipinto and takes on a life of its own, perpetuating the myth of the single, designed representation. In the case of this dipinto, we are fortunate in that the original still exists. Moreover, we have the meticulous technical description that Schmalz made to accompany his drawing, a description which Rostovtzeff and other scholars have not sufficiently taken into account in their interpretation.

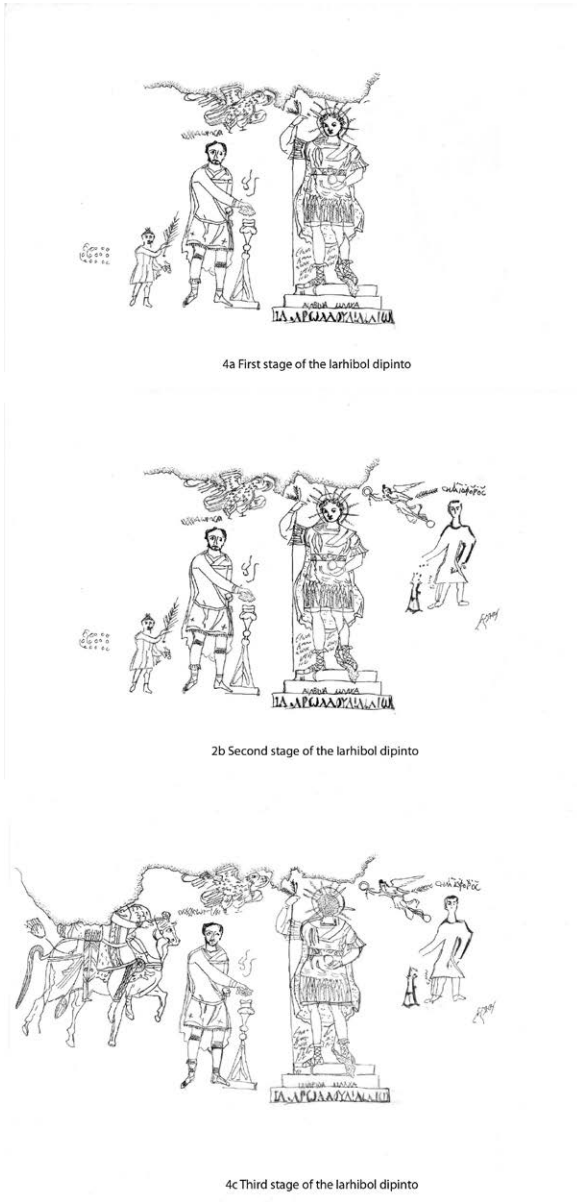


Figure 4a. first stage of the Iarhibol dipinto. b. second stage of the Iarhibol dipinto. c. third and last stage of the Iarhibol dipinto. Drawings by Lucinda Dirven.

Taking the materiality of this dipinto as a starting point, we can distinguish at least three stages in its life. The original dipinto shows the Roman officer Heliodorus, followed by a much smaller companion, sacrificing to the statue of the Palmyrene god Iarhibol, receiving a wreath from an eagle (Figure 4a). The scene is a condensed representation of the painting depicting the sacrifice of the tribune Julius Terentius, his men of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* and their standard bearer, before three Palmyrene deities.[70] Unlike the painting, however, the dipinto is not an official representation and although the sacrificant is a Roman officer, he is not a tribune and of lower rank. Instead of being escorted by his unit, this officer is only accompanied by the small figure of a boy, reminiscent of the servants in the so-called Sacrifice of Otes painting, from Room K in the Temple of Bel.[71] The dipinto was clearly made by a skilled hand. Given its high quality, it was probably painted by one of the scribes working in the room, who was also a prolific draughtsman. The professional hand that painted the god's name on the tiers of his pedestal suggests as much (if drawing and text were indeed made by the same hand). He may have depicted an event he witnessed, or perhaps he painted himself

[67] Rostovtzeff 1935: 251.

[68] There is a lot of discussion about the definition of a graffito. Cf. Baird and Taylor 2011: 3-7, who note that the definition of graffiti is contextual and stress the performative aspects of graffiti. On graffiti in Dura in particular, see Baird 2011.

[69] Baird and Taylor 2011: 6.

[70] Above, note 28.

[71] Dirven 1999: 300-302. Here, accompanying inscriptions allow us to identify one of the boys as the son of the person sacrificing, the other is possibly a servant of the eunuch Otes (idem, 298-299).

while performing a sacrifice to the god Iarhibol.[72] This would be more in keeping with the unofficial, graffito-like nature of the dipinto, in which the maker is likely to be personally involved. As it happens, we know of an *actuarius* called Heliodorus, whose portrait (not unlike that of the officer in question) was painted on a ceiling tile found in a house in block L 7.[73] In any case, *actuarii* were Roman officers of considerable rank and therefore dressed as such.[74]

At a later stage (it is unclear how much later), the sacrificial figure of Artemidorus the standard bearer and the figure of Victoria were painted to the right of the divine statue (Figure 4b). The style and line work of these figures clearly show that both were added by a different, less practised hand. Hence it is probable that Artemidorus personally added a drawing of himself and the figure of Victory to the picture.[75] In our modern society such an addition to a sacred image could be interpreted as an impertinent act, but in the context of Dura and the ancient world such an addition was widely accepted and interpreted instead as an act of devotion.[76] With this drawing, Artemidorus responds to the image of Heliodorus sacrificing to the god, expressing his devotion to Iarhibol by including himself in the scene. It shows how graffiti can attract similar graffiti, what Ilaria Bucci has called the 'me-too' phenomenon.[77] It is important to note that Artemidorus also included his name. It is not entirely inconceivable that the standard-bearer indeed attended this or similar events. The sacrifice of Julius Terentius also prominently features a standard-bearer.

The victorious Sasanian general and his horse are a second important addition (Figure 4c). The slightly fresher colour of the ink suggests that horse and rider were painted later. To make room for the victorious Sasanian general and his horse, the small figure behind Heliodorus has been deliberately scraped away, as have the small circles under the horse's feet.[78] In front of the horse's head and through the name of Heliodorus, has been scratched 'Neikator', no doubt a reference to the general rather than the god, as Hopkins suggested.[79] Finally, lines have been deliberately scratched through the Roman worshippers and the face of the Palmyrene god was destroyed on purpose.[80] All this suggests that the horseman was painted during the Sasanian occupation, by an unknown but pro-Sasanian artist.[81] The praetorium building and its adjoining annex were undoubtedly of great symbolic importance to the Sasanian troops. Not only was the depiction of the victorious general a way for the Sasanians to claim this highly charged Roman space and, by extension, the city of Dura as a whole, but by deliberately destroying the god's face and by scratching through the Roman worshippers, the painter adds to the humiliation of the Roman troops. The Sasanians undoubtedly identified the figure on the pedestal with the divine protection of the defeated garrison, either in the form of a deity or possibly in the person of the emperor. After all, the image of Iarhibol is iconographically almost identical to that of the emperor, and perhaps Iarhibol's epithet *Malka* (King) on the steps of his pedestal[82] was misunderstood by the Sasanian viewer.[83] The removal or destruction of cult images of the defeated enemy is, of course, a well-known and ancient practice, which adds insult to injury.[84]

When the Roman soldiers returned after the Sasanians had left Dura around 254 CE, they found the dipinto transformed with the face of the god smashed. As James rightly points out, we know very little about the composition of the garrison in the city's final years and it is not clear whether soldiers serving in the twentieth Palmyrene cohort returned to Dura.[85] Either way, by

[72] Rostovtzeff 1935: 250 notes the name Heliodorus is many times written in ink on the same wall. Cf. PR 6: 488. Goldman 1985: 283-284 opts that the artist was an army clerk, belonging to the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*. He does not identify the artist as Heliodorus, the officer depicted in the graffito.

[73] Note Rostovtzeff 1935: 250, where he writes that Heliodorus in the dipinto is undoubtedly a portrait. For the (famous) ceiling tile, see PR 6: 291-292. Of course, without a patronymic it is impossible to identify either person with certainty. Iovine 2023: 96 list nine Heliodoruses as members of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing whether Heliodorus from L 7 (who is on the list) was also a member of this cohort. In addition, there are eight other Heliodoruses attested in the papyri as members of the twentieth Palmyrene cohort, which of course fits very well with the worship of Iarhibol. Among these is a *dromidarius, cum epistulis* in 100, col. XLIV.

[74] PR 5: 228 commenting on painted inscription no. 561 from adjacent room W 12, in which mention is made of an *actuarius*. Cf. James 2004: pl. 11 for a reconstruction drawing of the *actuarius* Heliodorus with two superior officers (tribune and centurion).

[75] Rostovtzeff 1935: 250 suspects the Victory figure was drawn by the same hand as Iarhibol but the line work is different.

[76] Stern 2012.

[77] Bucci 2023: 614.

[78] Schmalz, quoted by Rostovtzeff 1935: 252 n. 127: 'the small figure under the feet of the horse and the adjacent figure to the right show evidence of further vandalism in scratches made over the original ink lines, so as to obliterate them entirely.'

[79] PR 5: 155 (inscription 473). If this is a reference to Iarhibol, it is difficult to explain why this graffito destroys the painted name of Heliodorus.

[80] These elements are noted by Rostovtzeff 1935: 249-250 (following the description by A.E. Schmalz) but are not taken into account in the interpretation he proposes. MacDonald 1986: 111 is the only later author to take these changes into account. Surprisingly, he ignores the destroyed face of the god. Both Schmalz and Rostovtzeff note the god's face was smashed deliberately, but neither attempts to explain this remarkable fact.

[81] Stylistically, the horseman belongs to Greco-Roman artistic tradition. During the early Sasanian period, both Roman hostages and Iranian artists worked in this artistic style that had global characteristics: Canepa 2009: 72-73.

[82] PR 5: 155 (inscription 473).

[83] The similarity between Palmyra's major deities and the emperor's representations fuelled the debate about the identity of the three gods in the Julius Terentius painting. For this debate and the symbolic implications of this similarity between Palmyrene deities and imperial cult statues, see Dirven 2007.

[84] On this widespread practice in the ancient Near East, see Johnson 2011 and Zaia 2015.

[85] James 2019: 242.

this time it had been decided that the former scribe's office and adjoining rooms were to be entrenched in the embankment, and hence there was no need to restore the painting. It is possible that the Roman soldiers destroyed the Sasanian general's head to take revenge on the Sasanian vandals before burying it, but this must remain a hypothesis.[86]

## To conclude

This reconstructed life of the Iarhibol-dipinto may serve as a red flag for the interpretation of graffiti where information about context and materiality is lost, and we have to rely on neat drawings published without context in specialist volumes. It also illustrates the enormous importance of archival archaeology, which allows us to bring out details that archaeologists did not consider important at the time of their discovery.[87] The recent interest in graffiti allows us to ask new questions about the intentions of both their makers and viewers, adding a new dimension to our understanding of the ancient world. Finally, this case study shows that iconographic details may provide us with exciting and unexpected information when studied in context.

## Abbreviations

PR 4 Baur, P. V. C., M. I. Rostovtzeff, and A. R. Bellinger (eds.), 1933. *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Preliminary Report of the Fourth Season of Work*, October 1930–March 1931. New Haven: Yale University Press.

PR 5 Rostovtzeff, M. I., (ed.), 1934. *The Excavations at Dura- Europos, Preliminary Report of the Fifth Season of Work, October 1931–March 1932.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

PR 6 Rostovtzeff, M.I., A.R. Bellinger, C. Hopkins, and C.B. Welles (eds.), 1936. *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Preliminary Report on the Sixth Season of Work, October 1932–March 1933.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

PR 7-8 Rostovtzeff, M.I., F.E. Brown, and C.B. Welles (eds.), 1936. *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Preliminary Report on the Seventh and Eighth Seasons of Work, 1933–1934 and 1934–1935.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

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[86] Rostovtzeff 1935: 251 writes that the rider's head was deliberately destroyed. This is not noted by Schmalz and cannot be verified in the field photographs or the original.

[87] As recently pointed out by Simon James with respect to Dura-Europos: James 2019: 9, 10, 44.

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# Effluvia of Empire: Sanitation and the Roman Army

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## Introduction

Simon James, when writing about the Roman army, has always been emphatic about the need to engage with the day-to-day realities of being a Roman soldier or part of wider Roman military societies. Over many years of teaching about the Roman army, or as Simon insists, the Roman armies (James 2003: 38-9), and how to look at it/them I have seen how his approaches and arguments have intrigued students, often more used to the top-down, emperors-and-battles narratives of traditional Roman military studies. In this paper, I will take the opportunity to outline briefly a subject that has niggled me for some time, a real-life, ubiquitous and permanent need of the armies: sanitation. What might appropriately be termed a bottom-up view of the Roman armies.

The paper will concentrate on the disposal of human excrement, liquid and solid, a crucial set of processes if the individual soldier and his unit more generally were to remain healthy and thus militarily effective. In the wider military community, there were other people connected with the troops who needed to be borne in mind: slaves; women and families; visitors. Thanks to recent studies we seem to know more about how the disposal of horse waste was organised compared with that of the humans (Hodgson and Bidwell 2004) and of course this was only part of the wider problem of the cycles of waste-product management and disposal.

Here the focus will be on the spaces within the defences of military sites, and of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE in Britain, for reasons of space and because the evidence for this period is fuller. Other aspects will also be discussed, in particular to what extent sanitation may be said to have been organised according to common principles or was the responsibility of individual units or specific 'army groups' and therefore liable to variation, according to James' plural 'Roman armies'. To what extent was sanitation and toilet practice normalised within individual units? Was induction into these norms part of the creation of soldierly identity? If so, to what extent in 'ethnic' units was some Roman military norm imposed onto indigenous practices? Did an insanitary Roman army itself act as a vector of diseases of empire?

## Practicalities

Excrement, liquid and solid, poses health risks to humans who encounter it. Urine at the point of production is normally sterile. In porous media such as soil it will drain away, but undrained, stagnant urine can be a breeding medium for pests. Faeces are well-known as vectors of pathogens, bacterial and viral, including several that can be fatal or debilitating, such as cholera, (amoebic) dysentery, typhoid, *Escherichia coli* and other agents of gastroenteritis. These names are how these diseases are identified in the modern world; they may have evolved considerably from ancient-world equivalents. Parasites such as helminths (intestinal parasites) are also propagated through faecal contact and are evidenced in archaeological contexts (Mitchell 2023: Ch.5). Worms are rarely fatal to adults but can cause pain and divert nutrients, leading to anaemia, debilitation and weight loss. The most common circumstance promoting the transmission of these pathogens is poor sanitary provision for eliminating bodily wastes coupled with poor personal hygiene. This results in the very widespread transmission through the faecal-oral route; hands contaminated with faecal material touch or enter the mouth allowing pathogens and parasites access to the human body. Sometimes foodstuffs become contaminated. Ingesting water contaminated with faecal material is a common infection route. Faeces are breeding-grounds for flies and the spread of the pathogens for which they are vectors. It should also be borne in mind that poor sanitation is often coupled with poor hygiene more generally, promoting the transmission of other agents such as cockroaches, fleas, fungal infections, lice, mites, rats, ticks. Most Roman soldiers lived in close contact with each other, so these diseases could spread easily both by contagion and infection.

A Roman military unit designated *quingenaria* consisted of about 500 or about 600 men (depending on whether purely infantry or with cavalry – *equitata*). One designated *milliaria* comprised about 800 or about 1,000 men (infantry or with cavalry). A legion consisted of about five thousand men. Each of these will have produced considerable quantities of liquid and solid effluvia daily. In default of precise figures from antiquity we can but use modern ones as a guide. The

healthy adult human produces of the order of 1,000 to 2,000 millilitres of urine per day depending on volume of input, transpiration etc. For faeces the modern daily output is of the order of 100 to 250g. depending on type of diet and other factors. If we take these modern figures above and multiply them by the rough numbers in Roman units we would get:

> *quingenaria* (at 500 men): 500 to 1,000 l of urine, 50,000 to 250,000 g of faeces (50-250 kg);
>
> *milliaria* (at 800 men): 600 to 1,600 l. of urine, 80,000 to 400,000 g. of faeces (80 to 400 kg.);
>
> legion 5,000 to 10,000 l. of urine, 500,000 to 2,500,000 g. of faeces (500 to 2,500 kg.).

These are approximations and should be seen as orders of magnitude rather than exact quantities. For faeces, the products of the preindustrial Roman military diet probably tended towards the lower end of the range.

**Ancient and modern perceptions**

Given the crucial importance of sanitation and hygiene for maintaining military effectiveness, the ancient sources on the army are remarkably silent on how this was accomplished. Narrative descriptions of Roman military activities (e.g. Caesar, Tacitus, Dio Cassius) do not concern themselves with such banalities. Of the two earlier extant ancient descriptions of the lay-out of Roman camps, Polybius Book VI: 27-42 of the later second century BC has a great deal to say about the lay-out of the tent- and horse-lines in a temporary camp but nothing on sanitary provision. Likewise (pseudo-)Hyginus: *De Munitionibus Castrorum* in the second century AD despite specifying the lay-out of the tent-lines and the positioning of the *valetudinarium* (hospital), is utterly silent on the topic of latrines and sanitation. Only in the fourth-century AD work of Vegetius is there reference to any need to have a care for sanitation. The *Epitoma Rei Militaris:* III, 2 states that amongst other things to be avoided was the consumption of harmful or swampy waters. It also counsels against an army on campaign staying too long in the same place during summer or autumn because of the risks from contamination of the water supply and the foulness of the smell itself: the army should shift camp frequently. The foulness of the smell (*odoris ipsius foeditate*) relates to the taint of 'miasma', what Vegetius here calls 'corrupt air' (*aere corrupto*). Vegetius is clear evidence for at least an empirical military awareness of the dangers of insanitary conditions, though without recommendations for the implementation of sanitary practice. 'Miasma' of course relates to ancient medical theories about disease and its transmission (cf. Jackson 1991). Medical writers such as Celsus and Galen held to the theory of the four 'humours' as cause and explanation for human illness, along with 'miasma' as the explanation for the spread of disease. There was no systematic knowledge of the vectors of contagious and infectious disease, no 'germ theory', so no appreciation of what their vectors were and the importance of their life cycles and habitats. Therefore, the crucial roles of sanitation and hygiene were not appreciated. 'Hygiene' was more about correct diet and exercise, and 'sanitation' in the sense of positive measures to promote cleanliness was not a concern, though excrement was clearly a source of 'miasma' and thus undesirable.

The surviving documents produced by the Roman army itself are likewise generally unforthcoming about sanitation and hygiene. One papyrus which is generally held to contain the word *stercus* is *P.Gen. Lat.* I, *verso*, a Flavian duty roster of *Legio III Cyrenaica* at Alexandria in Egypt. The word appears in l.32, the entry for a M. Longinus. This has been taken to mean specifically excrement, but more recent analysis of the word suggests it has a more general meaning of 'refuse' (Juntunen 2018: 143-45). So, Longinus seems to have been on cleaning fatigues. In the roster there is also *ballio*, a homophone for *balneo*, 'at the baths', where part of the duty could have been cleaning of attached latrines. This also recurs regularly as a duty in the ostraca from Bu Njem (Marichal 1992: ostraca 1-62). The extensive collections of papyri from Dura-Europos contain no mention of any such activities (Bradford Welles *et al.* 1959). Neither do the writing-tablets from Vindolanda, though the well-known strength report *Tab. Vindol.* 154 (Bowman and Thomas 1994: 90-98) lists ten men with inflammation of the eyes, *lippientes*, often a sign of poor general hygiene. But given the minuscule fraction of all Roman military documentation that has survived this absence of testimony may simply be the chances of survival.

The voluminous modern studies of the Roman army have been similarly coy about matters of sanitation. In part this may be because the ancient written sources themselves have so little to say about it, nor until recently was there a great deal of archaeological evidence. But it is also very likely to have been because of modern squeamishness over discussing matters cloacal (cf. George 2008: esp.1-14; Guerrand 1985: 7-11; Hobson 2010: Ch.12). Two relatively recent general conspectuses on legionary fortresses and on auxiliary forts have very little to say, the former covers the topic in under a page (von Petrikovits 1975: 106) the latter in three pages (Johnson 1983: 211-14). This is of course a reticence not confined to the study of the army, it is characteristic of the study of the Roman world more widely, though this has been changing (cf. Bouet 2009: Introduction and refs.; Hobson 2010; Jensen, Koloski-Ostrow, Moormann eds. 2011). The emphasis in these

Figure 1. The latrine at Housesteads from the west. Photograph taken by Thomas Heide.

publications has been on urban sanitation and latrines. Military provision is rarely considered (but n.b. Goldwater 2011). In part this may have been because the recognition of latrine buildings at a few military installations allowed researchers to treat these as a solution to a problem which they were reluctant to recognise in the first place. Such reluctance to address defecation and its corollaries fits into a wider strategy of 'institutionalized not knowing' detectable in academic disciplines when faced with topics from which they prefer to avert their eyes, and nose (van de Geest 2016).

***Foricae et Latrinae***

In this section the evidence for the provision of latrines and other possible waste-disposal mechanisms will seek to establish some sense of what sorts of evidence are available. The examination will commence with two well-known stone-built forts. Then it will examine the evidence from some timber-built installations. Finally, the problem of sanitary provision at temporary fortifications ('marching camps') will be reviewed.

To start with a discussion of two emblematic British sites, Housesteads and Vindolanda, and the questions raised about the nature of sanitary provision. At Housesteads the latrine (Figure 1) was revealed in 1898 in the angle between the south-east angle tower and the south wall of the fort (Simpson (ed.) 1976: 133-52). Some 9.45 by 4.87 m internally, the building's function is clear from the deep channels around the walls, over which would have been the seating, along with the shallow gutter in front for washing cleansing materials. The outfall of the latrine through the south wall of the fort, discharged into a natural declivity, which must have become noisome. The latrine was constructed as part of the primary Hadrianic fort, an interesting comment on the perception of its importance. How many users could the latrine have held at any one time? This depends on debatable statistics such as the breadth of users' hips and the spacing per user deemed appropriate: here a figure of 60cm per person will be guesstimated, according with observable spacing, hole-edge to hole-edge, at surviving Roman latrines (cf. Wilson 2011: 101). This would allow for 16 persons on each of the long sides, probably fewer because of the curvature of the sewer at the west end, but plus a few extra along the western side: in round figures about 35, probably a maximum capacity. The garrison of the fort in the third century was *cohors I Tungrorum milliaria* (Rushworth 2009, 283-4), possibly also in the second century. The area of the fort, 2 ha, agrees with that of other forts with milliary garrisons. In this case the latrines could have accommodated the entire garrison in 50 'sittings', each of unknown length but probably of the order of three to five minutes; up to four hours. Of course, real life is not that choreographed, nevertheless it suggests that the latrine could theoretically have accommodated the entire garrison over the course of a day. Other users of the latrine need to be borne in mind also. Doubtless there were 'rush hours' such as the start of day and just before and just after the changing of the watch. There were also latrines for certain specialised groups, with a probable one in the *praetorium* for the commanding


Figure 2. Plan of the Vindolanda fort showing latrines.

officer and his household and a certain one in the south-western corner of the building conventionally identified as the *valetudinarium*, sensible given the adverse gastric effects of many diseases. Objections to the traditional identification of *valetudinaria* should be noted (Baker 2004: Ch.6), though the provision in this building of a latrine is secure. There is some evidence that here, as at many forts, the centurions' quarters may have been equipped with latrines (Rushworth 2009: 119; cf. Hodgson and Bidwell 2004 for South Shields). Though the single latrine building at Housesteads could theoretically have dealt with the garrison and ancillary personnel on a daily basis, this may be too idealised. What of reality (Jensen 2011)? For a start, if the latrine were used at least once a day by the best part of 800 men (and others), what state would it be in by the end of the day, unless regularly cleaned? Moreover, it is sited in one angle of the fort. Would it be the destination of choice or practicality? Especially at night. Especially in the winter months. In fact, it could be argued that the Housesteads latrine is a good counterargument to the assumption that such structures answer the question of unit sanitation, absolving us from further contemplation of a distasteful subject.

At Vindolanda, no latrine provision integral with the construction of the stone fort has yet been identified for the eight hundred or so men of the *cohors II Nerviorum*. By the third century with new blocks in the north-east and south-east angles it is estimated that there was latrine accommodation for 29. In the fourth century the addition of another latrine against the southern part of the west wall, possibly seating 16, a new six-seater latrine attached to the *praetorium*, a single-seater at the rear of the *principia* and provision in centurial quarters the situation would have improved markedly (Figure 2). In addition, here was the small latrine attached to the extra-mural bathhouse. A wooden single-user toilet seat has also been recovered. By the third century the garrison was the *cohors IV Gallorum equitata*, a quingenary unit, but whether the complement of the unit was still at the second-century level is debatable; it

Figure 3. Aerial view of part of construction camp 3 at Inchtuthil showing pit-lines.

may have been significantly reduced. The evidence for the insufficiency of latrine provision for the garrison at Vindolanda in the second century is even more stark than for Housesteads. Clearly, how sanitation was organised at this date remains a question needing further attention. Later, latrine provision seems to have become more of a concern.

The low level of provision of latrines holds true for the known latrines at other forts in Britain such as the fully published example at Bearsden (Breeze 2016: 327-30), attached to the bathhouse in the annexe, a nine-seater for a garrison probably in the low hundreds. The examples of Housesteads and Vindolanda are supported by the evidence from other forts in Britain (Goldwater 2011) that the identified latrine buildings may well not have answered all the needs of the garrison. This does raise the question of what, or who, these buildings were for? We need to look for other evidence for sanitation and the disposal of excrement. We also need to replace latrines within the wider water-management cycles at forts (cf. Beaumont 2008) to understand how the water they consumed was supplied and drained. The sanitary provision for commanding officers, centurions and possibly the sick has been alluded to. What about provision in or around barracks? A review of the topic (Davison 1989: 233-37) did identify several installations at legionary and auxiliary barracks, principally in Britain, but it is notable that there was no consistency in the amount, location or nature of such provision, even within a single barrack, let alone a fortress. One may also point to installations such as the latrine inserted into the rear of the rampart in the north-eastern angle of the fortress at Caerleon. On a small sample it is noticeable that freestanding latrine buildings tend to be constructed against the inner faces of the fort walls, mostly near the angles of the defences.

The situation with timber-built forts and fortresses is broadly comparable, a general lack of identifiable/identified provision. There is a site which can serve as exemplar of what sorts of provision might be looked for: Usk. There the 1965-76 excavations (Manning (ed.) 1981) revealed an area of *horrea*, granaries, in the eastern part of the fortress, with to their west an area of open ground in which lay a number of rectangular pits interpreted as cesspits for simple two- to five-seater latrines (Manning (ed.) 1981: 149-58, 163-651, 90-94). These apparently were not organised according to any regular pattern, for instance one attached to each *horreum*, though presumably they served the men on duty at the *horrea*. The 1973-74 Cattle Market excavations revealed part of what was interpreted as a *fabrica*, with a latrine in one room and another to the

rear of the street-front colonnade, next to the setting for a possible urinal (Manning (ed.)1989: Ch.3). As with the *horrea* it would make sense to make sanitary provision for the workforce in the building.

The greatest concentrations of Roman troops would have been in the large, temporary campaign fortifications ('marching camps'), well-known in Britain and increasingly elsewhere too. It has been estimated that the largest of these could have held between 20,000 and 40,000 men (Jones 2012: 47-58). Almost all the interior features of most temporary camps in Britain have been lost to subsequent land-use. Nevertheless there is vanishingly little evidence for cesspits or the like. At one of the better-preserved and extensively excavated camps, Kintore, there were 40 pits, interpreted by the excavators as rubbish pits (Cook, Dunbar 2008: 129-33), but a function for at least some as latrine pits might be considered. Nevertheless, they show no pattern or regularity in their incidence, certainly nothing corresponding to the imagined tent-lines to accommodate the soldiers. Only at the somewhat longer-term temporary 'construction camps' at Inchtuthil can regular, linear provision of pits in some areas be seen on aerial photographs (Figure 3). There is no discussion of their function, though the published sections suggest similarities to Usk (Frere 1985: esp. 230-31). The general lack of latrines in the main fortress is specifically noted (Pitts, St Joseph 1985: 101). By way of comparison, a modern, fortified, temporary camp, that for the Glastonbury festival makes massive provision for up to 200,000 persons over several days, which would often be archaeologically-visible (Glastonbury Festival website, viewed 3/10/2023 a). Dividing these figures by ten, the contrast with the lack of apparent provision at a Roman camp of this capacity is flagrant. No wonder Vegetius counselled against prolonged use of a temporary camp. It is likely that Roman military installations would to the modern nose have been malodorous, with distinctive 'smellscapes'.

Of course, there were ways of disposing of excrement other than formal latrines, the most obvious being ceramic or metal vessels or wooden buckets, which could then be emptied. These could have been in metal latrine buckets, but possible examples in ceramics have been identified (Bouet 2008: 64-79; Petznek *et al.* (eds.) 2011; Petznek 2018), generally deep and round or ovoid, like metal buckets from Pompeii (Bouet 2008: Fig.47). These are examples of the vessels named variously in the ancient sources as *lasana*, *matella*, *scaphium*, along with re-used amphorae. Wooden buckets are known from sites such as Vindolanda. Such provision could be invoked to explain away the lack of formal latrines, but it still raises serious questions. What was the frequency of provision? One per *contubernium*? Whose responsibility, were they? Who emptied them? Slaves? Where were they emptied? Into any formal latrine? Into fort ditches? Onto the surrounding agricultural land (cf. Flohr, Wilson 2011)? Such vessels are elusive in the military ceramics of Roman Britain, but should they or other possible containers be posited, then residue analyses would be vital. Given the apparent shortage of sanitary provision at forts in Britain, perhaps the surprising thing about *Tab. Vindol.* 154 is that, in addition to the ten with eye infections and six wounded, only 15 were *aegri*, on the sick list.

**Sanitation and the soldier**

Roman fortresses and forts of the first and second centuries AD are famous for their overall similarity in form, layout and provision of internal buildings, *principia*, *praetorium*, *horrea*, barracks, baths and so on. Though no two are exactly alike there was clearly a common set of expectations as to the buildings proper to a fort/ress, and this provision was reproduced widely across the empire. So, the lack of consistent forms of sanitary provision at Roman military installations is hard to understand, given their necessity. In a way, provision of sanitary facilities that we recognise might be seen, on present evidence, as an exception rather than the rule. An important part of the answer may have been provision (e.g. latrine buckets) that we cannot readily see, and it may also be that we have not looked sufficiently hard. It also seems to be the case that the 'Roman army' devolved to a very low level a great deal to do with the alimentary canal. Food preparation and consumption seem to have been the responsibility most probably of the *contubernium*, with the unit supplying consumables. 'Rampart-back' buildings, regularly include ovens, for instance at Inchtuthil (Pitts & St Joseph 1985: 195-200); longer-lived sites such as Caerleon developed more elaborate sets of structures (Boon 1972, 84). So there would be a logic to the management of the resulting waste products being likewise devolved to *contubernium* level. This finds some support from the recognised instances of sanitary provision in barracks (Davison 1989, 233-37), also perhaps for the mounts at cavalry barracks where they occupied one room of the *contubernium*. To us this seems very insanitary, but it should be remembered that the British prison practice of morning 'slopping out' of nightsoil in buckets in cells was only discontinued from 1996.

One of Simon James' more stimulating arguments has been that Roman forts were mechanisms for control of the 'brutal and licentious soldiery' and environments within which the 'Roman soldier' was created (cf. James 1999). It is this aspect that I would like to examine briefly here, looking at the Roman army as a 'total institution' (cf. Goffman 1961). These are defined as settings where the people involved are cut off from

the outside world, in which they have a common purpose or condition and in which they lead a closely supervised life with a great many activities conducted in public and where conformity to norms of purpose and behaviour is enjoined. Besides asylums, settings such as boarding schools, monasteries and prisons are regarded in the same light, and most obviously the military. Clearly a Roman fort to a very considerable extent conforms with the notion of a 'total institution'. Physically as well as functionally it to an extent cut off its garrison from the outside world. Within it, the soldiers' lives were ordered and controlled and largely conducted under the gaze of others: privacy must have been very rare. Much of his life must have been spent in his *contubernium*, both in the sense of the physical accommodation space and of the *contubernales* brigaded with him. So, there will have been a series of 'informal', soldier-generated social frameworks in addition to the 'formal' ones of command and control.

This may seem to take us some distance from the subject of sanitation, but a significant aspect of the reworking of the soldier's identity could have been to do with bodily functions and their physical, cultural and religious contexts. The Roman armies recruited from peoples across the empire. The auxiliary units drew on a huge range of different ethnicities, each with its own social structures, cultural practices and religious beliefs. Amongst these there will have been a wide variety of norms and beliefs about human excrement, its appropriate management and its physical settings, also its cultural and religious significances. To what extent were cultural systems concerning excreta carried over into Roman military contexts? It might have been that in 'ethnic' units' commonalities of cultural and religious attitudes were maintained. On the other hand, it might have been that the physical, temporal and disciplinary settings of the fort promoted 'incorporation through routine' (Haynes 2013: Ch.11). A feature of 'total institutions' is that in their desire to impose as much control as possible, they structure and divide up time, allocating specific activities to specific times or blocks of time, especially daily. The 'inmates' are acculturated to the demands of the institution through repeated and routine performance of practices leading to their normalisation. This could impact on practices of excretion, either intentionally by designating certain times for such activities, or else by interdicting excretion during times devoted to other activities. This is a well-known feature of modern workplaces, but also inevitably occurs in other settings where time and activities are closely controlled and monitored, such as the military. So, one of the bodily disciplines to be learned by a recruit was the prescribed levels of bladder and bowel control and acceptance of the milieux in which excretion was carried out. In the Roman army it seems likely that often these bodily functions had to be performed in the presence of others, under the 'male gaze'. On the other hand, a latrine could have been an unmonitored locus for socialisation, possibly subversion (discussions, graffiti). Sanitation, its provision and its performance probably had important social and cultural effects on Roman soldiers across a wide range of ethnic and cultural origins.

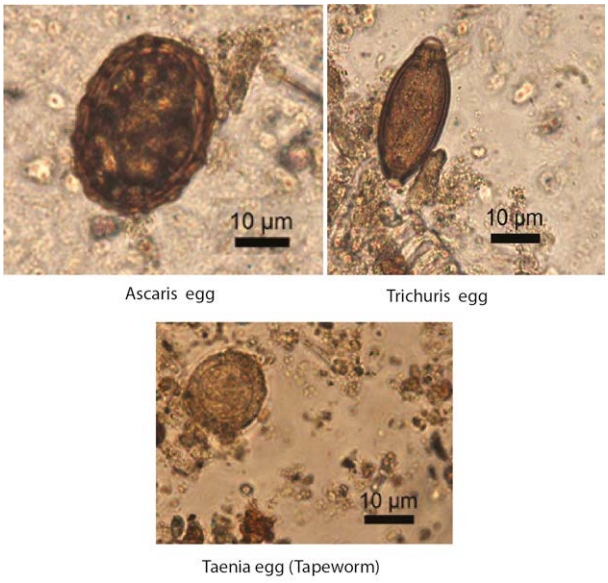


Figure 4. Roundworm and whipworm eggs from latrine drain at Vindolanda.

## Roman conquest and the propagation of disease

To return to the list of diseases related to poor sanitation outlined at the start of this paper we may briefly consider a form of 'Romanization' rather different from recent socio-cultural analyses, one which examines the possible role of the Roman army as an instrument of colonisation by spreading diseases due to its poor sanitation and hygiene. It has long been known that one of the most effective (if unforeseen) weapons in the arsenal of the *conquistadores* in the New World was disease, especially smallpox, to which the indigenous communities had no natural immunity. Recently the consequences of disease on global history have become the focus of major syntheses (e.g. Schama 2023), a legacy of Covid-19. To what extent did dubious sanitation in Roman armies and the associated diseases and vectors of disease this facilitated mean that these latter marched alongside the troops?

Studies of the contents of Roman military sewers and cesspits, including in Britain, have been synthesised by Mitchell (2023: Ch.5), showing the consistent presence of the eggs of roundworm and whipworm and occasionally of tapeworm (Figure 4), this last

deriving from undercooked meats (a comment on food preparation in *contubernia*?) (Mitchell 2023: Table 5.1). What we do not have, as yet, any evidence for the irruption of the Roman army into new populations being accompanied by a spread of novel diseases in the manner of the Americas. Mitchell's work (2023: Ch4.) shows that the parasites characteristic of the Roman period were mostly already present in the Iron Age. But we know malaria was endemic in the Mediterranean basin long before the Roman expansion (cf. Sallares 2002) and so far, there is an absence of evidence for malaria in Temperate Europe before the Roman period. Other disease vectors such as lice, ticks or rats travelling with the armies could have introduced new diseases, for instance typhus, but for the moment this can only be speculation. Future analyses of sewage and other preservative contexts may yield the necessary evidence.

But disease could be a two-way flow, as modern European empires found to their cost on encountering virulent tropical diseases such as yellow fever. This happened also in the Roman world, with 'plagues', mostly of west-Eurasian provenance. One of the best instances of this was the army returning from campaign in the East as the major vector of the Antonine 'plague' into Italy and elsewhere (e.g. Harper 2017: 98-115). The army itself seems to have been hit hard (Harper 2017: 112). In this instance the Roman army unintentionally debilitated the Roman empire. Poor sanitation and hygiene could have devastating consequences far beyond the individual soldier, *contubernium* or unit.

## Envoi

This contribution has been very much inspired by Simon James' insistence on the realities of Roman military life. I hope he feels that sanitation and hygiene now deserve more attention and have more ramifications than perhaps they have traditionally been accorded and that there are unexpected insights to be gained from such a study of the effects of Roman imperialism and military colon-isation.

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# Part 4

# Cultural Relativism and Belonging on the Frontiers

# The Roman Military on the Syrian Euphrates: Small Finds in Roman Global Worlds

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**Introduction**

A blazing red shield, crowned by an eagle, laurel wreath held aloft in its beak, and framed by winged victories. Sometimes, even when objects are unique, as is the famed *scutum* of Dura-Europos (Figure 1), they are unmistakable traces of the Roman military (James 2004, no.629; Rostovtzeff *et al.* (eds) 1936, 456–466), and all that it had in common: the symbols that it shared, the tools that it used. Those traces are unmistakable because sometimes ancient objects align neatly with understandings which have become naturalised in the modern conception of how the Roman military worked; that is, it was monolithic, 'an instrument of state power comprising professional soldiers' (James 2019, 298). The *scutum*, excavated in the early 1930s from the fill of a tower of the city wall in which it was deposited during the city's death throes (James 1985; Baird 2012a), with its tidy and recognisable iconography, fits well with such a view, employing as it does 'typical' Roman military symbols and technology.

That imperial monolith of the military has been contrasted however, materially, as well as in lived experience, with civil communities (Pollard 2000), although recent years have shown these groups to be more entangled than previously imagined (Allison 2013). This is not only because the extent and composition of the wider military community associated with garrisons such as the one at Dura-Europos and elsewhere are coming into increasingly clearer focus (James 2018; Greene 2020), but also because internally the Roman military can now be seen to be much more heterogeneous than had long been presumed (Haynes 2013). While some aspects of military life were, of course, communal and in some ways uniform – as a glance at the Dura-Europos papyri, recording the many men who were recorded as having the name *Aurelius* in the military rosters made after the Antonine Constitution, attest (*P. Dura* 100; Salway 1994, 134–135; Iovine 2023), it is now clear that homogeneity in an aspect of one sphere, such as onomastics, might sit easily alongside heterogeneity in another, such as religious practice, foodways, or dress, and that there were complex entanglements between imperial and local influences (Greene and Birley 2024).

At Dura-Europos, it was not only the unique and spectacular which was preserved, objects like the *scutum* or the synagogue paintings, but also many, much more mundane, objects. This contribution aims to examine some of the range of entanglements in the Roman military through a contextual approach to Roman military material culture. That is, rather than identifying Roman military objects from their form, be they painted shields or small copper-alloy belt buckles, it instead looks to Roman military contexts. Specifically, it examines Roman military buildings in the third century urban garrison at Dura-Europos to ask what Roman urban military assemblages consist of in this period, and what those assemblages can elucidate about the nature of the community there (Allison 2008, 2013). In doing so, it seeks to further add to our knowledge so expertly built by James' catalogue of arms, armour, and military equipment (James 2004), and his description of the military base (James 2019), in the context of considering that base as being inhabited not only by soldiers but by a broader extended military community (James 2018).

Indeed, James himself raised the complexity of the identification of military objects, asking 'What constitutes a military artefact?' (James 2004, 6; similarly, 'What is a military assemblage?', Allason-Jones 1999). Here, I ask instead, of the same broad material as James, what objects are found in 'military spaces' at Dura-Europos, and whether such an approach draws in objects which might otherwise be ignored, and thus enables a new perspective on what is considered the military assemblage at the site. Indeed, at Dura, it is already clear that the excavated objects sometimes tell new stories about the use of architectural space. For instance, in the agora, looking carefully at object assemblages in addition to the architectural adaptation of vernacular buildings reveals the way those buildings were used by Roman military personnel in the last phases of the city's life in the middle of the third century, a presence which might otherwise be considered invisible, but which comes into focus through the distinctive military material culture, including numerous fragments of arms and armour (Baird 2012c, 159).

The transformation of the northern sectors of Dura-Europos from a civil settlement into a military base is now well known, and while the dates are not definitive, much of the transformation seemed to have happened in the early years of the third century (James 2019, 249ff). The base which was focussed on the northern

Figure 1. Third Century Roman scutum, made of wood and rawhide, excavated in tower 19 of Dura-Europos. Yale University Art Gallery 1933.715.

side of the site (see Figure 2) included new structures such as a Roman palace, baths, and an amphitheatre, and converted old ones for new uses, including the use of parts of the Temple of Azzanathkona for use by Roman military bureaucrats, with pre-existing local houses being converted for military accommodation (Baird 2014, 115ff; James 2019, 103ff). Among those structures, many objects which can be classified as military were found, including for example elements of military dress, such as copper alloy belt fittings and brooches. But also recovered were many other objects, often probably the personal possessions of soldiers, which might not immediately be classified as military objects, including other dress items, lamps, and ceramics. For example, in block E8, a block which had consisted of a number of courtyard houses typical to the civil settlement that were taken over for use by the military in the third century (and sometimes described as a barracks), a distinctive assemblage of objects were repeatedly found together in small clusters, perhaps representing the remains of soldiers' kit-bags. These objects, on their own, are innocuous: a knife, a spoon, bone pins, a lamp, a hook, a needle (Baird 2014, 122), but together, repeatedly, in a military context, they elucidate part of the picture of communal living within the military base, in which members of the military had both shared and personal responsibilities.

The link between such small objects and the larger issues of diversity or multiculturalism is not an easy one. While Dura's diversity is itself easily enough demonstrated through its variety of languages and cults within its relatively compact city walls (Altaweel and Squitieri 2018, 151; Elsner 2001, 278; Hoffman and Brody 2011; Sommer 2016; see also Fine 2011, 248, who critiques the 'projecting of...multicultural ideals onto silent artifacts'), how that diversity played out in lived experience is more difficult to examine. And yet, in frontier zones such as the one in which Dura was situated, co-presence of different peoples, religions, and cultural affiliations was undoubtedly a social reality. One aspect of that diversity was the presence of specific groups of peoples from other places, for instance auxiliaries, and at Dura the well-known presence of the Twentieth Palmyrene Cohort is a useful example of a group of people who were at once regional, imperial, and local (Dirven 1999; Dirven and McCarty 2014, 2020). Can the material culture of the military base at Dura further elucidate the diversity of the military population? In the following section an attempt is made to answer that question through the objects found in military buildings.

## Objectifying military contexts at Dura

The artefacts excavated at Dura during the joint expedition by Yale and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters in the 1920s and 30s are not a simple assemblage, in their composition, preservation, recovery, documentation, or interpretation. A wide variety of depositional contexts preserved different types of objects across the site, for example the deep strata of the siege mines and ramparts preserved organic materials including the *scutum,* but the much shallower deposits in the base area on the north side of the settlement, including those cut by a modern road, preserved far fewer objects (James, Baird and Strutt 2012, 114). The accuracy of recording also varied widely, depending on the number of workers and the member of the team who directed the excavations (e.g. on the troubles with du Mesnil du Buisson's records, see James 2011, esp. 75ff). The publication of the objects which were recovered was also varied. While exceptional finds were published, others lacked systematic attention from the excavators in the *Preliminary Reports* which were published, although field records including object and photograph registers make it possible to reconstruct some contexts (Baird 2012b). Here, I utilise those field object records, made on site before the small finds were divided between Yale and Damascus, together with the freshly interpreted military base (James 2019) to examine the material culture of Roman military contexts at Dura. The first example is in block E7, and the second, F3. Both are in the northern side of the site which was transformed by the Roman military (see Figure 2).

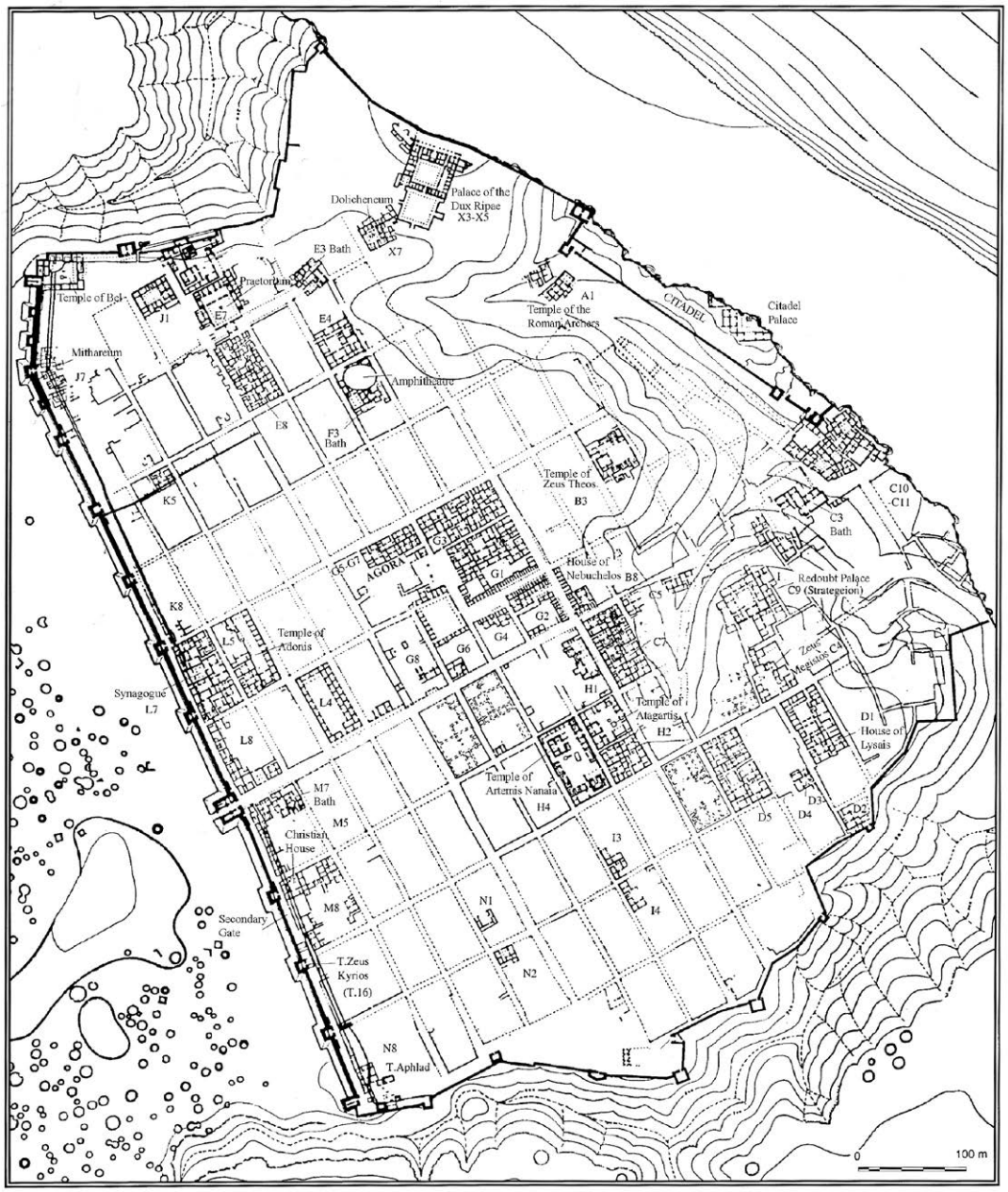


Figure 2. Site plan of Dura-Europos, adapted by author from that of Detweiler.

## Block E7: the Temple of Artemis Azzanathkona, its military compound, and the *Principia*

On the northern edge of Dura in a zone named 'E7' by the excavators were structures that had, before the implantation of the Roman military base, been a temple to the goddess Artemis Azzanathkona. Towards the end of the city's life, the Roman military had taken over the north side of the site, including this structure, and its western side had been adapted for re-use by the Roman military (James 2019, 70–78), serving, probably, administrative functions. The redevelopment of this part of the city included the installation of the military base's *principia*, originally labelled as the 'Praetorium' (Figure 2). Excavated in the fifth season of work at Dura, (Rostovtzeff (Ed) 1934, 131ff; Rostovtzeff *et al.* (Eds) 1936, 482ff), the complexity of the buildings were not recognised immediately, but religious sculptures including a cult relief, and inscriptions, identified the temple including its *naos* complex (rooms D2, D3, D4, D5), and its *salle aux gradins* (room W9) (Figure 3). The administrative functions in the Temple of Azzanathkona during its use by Roman auxiliaries are attested by the wealth of military papyri recovered in room W13 (Welles, Fink and Gilliam 1959, 3–4; Iovine 2023, 21). Just to the south of the sanctuary complex of Azzanathkona, separated by a small alley, was the *principia*, whose military use was also similarly secured through Latin

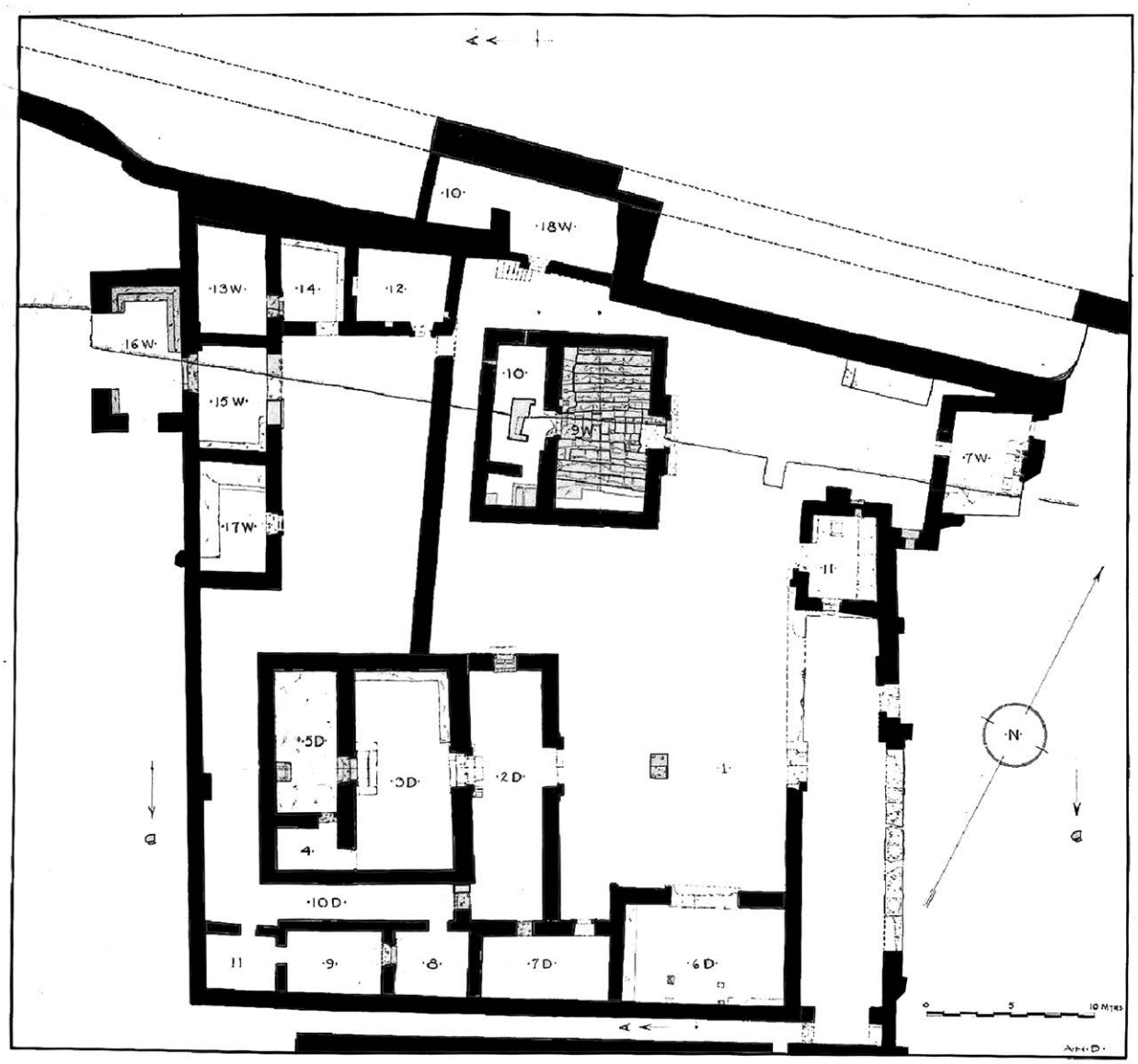


Figure 3. Plan of the Temple of Artemis Azzanathkona and its environs Dura-Europos Archive, Yale University Art Gallery. See now James 2019, Figure 5.6.

inscriptions and a variety of other evidence, not least its form, conforming as it does to a type seen at other Roman military sites (James 2019, 78–90).

From E7 as a whole were found more than 350 small finds, recorded in the field object registers made during the excavations. Of those, more than half (185) were coins, whose association with specific contexts has unfortunately since been lost (Bellinger 1949; Baird 2014, 157). The assemblage has a number of additional complicating factors: the lack of stratigraphic excavation, and hence any fine-grained chronological controls on archaeological contexts; the change in function of the building associated with the Roman military base; the complex abandonment of the site (see also, e.g. Dirven this volume on the sequence within Azzanathkona as attested through *dipinti*); and, the erosion caused by a later road which was placed through the *principia*, and was in use from at least the Ottoman period into the twenty-first century, contributing to the erosion of already shallow deposits particularly in the *principia*. Nonetheless, the object registers, made in the field before the artefacts were divided in the *partage* between New Haven and Damascus, stand to elucidate some aspects of the buildings' use, and by extension, the diversity of their occupants. The object registers include important, now well-known objects, such as the cult relief of Artemis Azzanathkona herself (field no. E1466; Damascus Museum no. 9012, Downey 1977, no.3, 11-14, 185-187), but predominantly include more prosaic finds.

Some of those finds are likely to relate to the use of the sanctuary, for example a silver votive or sculpture

Figure 4. Photograph of carved carnelian gem, depicting w winged victory, set in copper alloy ring, from E7-W17. Yale University Art Gallery 1938.2341; Dura-Europos archive photo z128.

fragment[1] and the leg of a thymiaterion[2] both from the *pronaos* (E7-D3). The recovery of these objects perhaps indicates that (as has been proposed by James) aspects of the building's sacred character remained in use after this part of the city was enclosed within the military base, and perhaps that civilians were permitted, perhaps at particular times, to access it (James 2019, 75). In the temple's courtyard, (E7-D Court), the register also records a 'bronze pendant', identified by James as a copper alloy rhomboidal pendant, a type of military ornament 'seen across the whole empire' (James 2004, 91, no. 234).[3] Similar copper alloy military pendants were also found in the *salle aux gradins* of the building (E7-W9),[4] such as a strap mount,[5] indicating that whatever else was happening in this room, the Roman military were undoubtedly present.[6] Similarly tied to larger networks were enamelled copper alloy objects catalogued as 'lockets' in the original publication series, but now known, from a range of sites, to be seal boxes, for sealing documents or parcels (Furger, Wartmann and Riha 2009; Andrews 2013).[7] These objects, of relatively standardised forms, not only reflect that military presence, but are indicative of the way that military, and Roman power, were also enabled and constrained by the affordances of objects. Seal boxes would have enclosed sealings, into which were impressed the marks of individuals. The marks were made with carved gems, set into finger rings. Individuals such as officers could, through the use of their seal, guarantee the privacy and authenticity of documents across time and space. One such ring, prone to accidental loss, was also found in the building, on which was depicted a winged victory (Figure 4).[8] This ring is an object type which tends not to be classified as military, but which, being found in an administrative area of a Roman miliary complex is very likely to have been used in the functioning of its bureaucracy.

In contrast to objects that would be recognizable across the empire are those used by the very same communities of people, but of local production. That is, the same soldiers whose dress items are so distinctive as part of a wider collective group, would have cooked, eaten, and drunk utilising almost entirely local ceramic vessels. The distinctive glossy red fabrics which are so characteristic of Roman military presence in the western empire were not needed at Dura, where regionally and locally produced common wares seemed to have fulfilled the needs of the military community: and indeed this was the case in E7, where the Dura common ware was the primary ceramic recorded (Dyson 1968; Vokaer 2014), along with a single green-glazed vase.[9] The ceramic lamps from the building, while only a few

[1] E955/1938.1415, recorded as a 'wing' in the object register, and classified as a sculpture in the Yale catalogue, the slight size is perhaps more indicative of a votive: 10.15cm long, .08cm thick, but the identification is not certain. Objects in the registers were given a field number corresponding to the season (e.g. those prefaced with 'E' are season 5, 'F' is season 6, etc), and objects accessioned by Yale University Art Gallery given a YUAG number beginning with the year of accession (here, 1938). Where known, I give each of these, but some objects have only a field number, either having been allocated to Damascus in the *partage*, discarded in the field, or otherwise lost.

[2] E978/1932.1665, recorded as 'Bronze Leg of Stand?' in object register.

[3] E1164/1932.1533.

[4] E1085/1932.1532a (James 2004 no. 208); E1085b/1932.1532b (James 2004 no. 201); E1085c/1932.1532c (James 2004 no. 207); E1085d/1932.1532d; E1085e/1932.1532e; E1157/1932.1534 (James 2004 no. 212).

[5] E1087b/1932.1645 (James 2004 no. 316)

[6] There were no stratigraphic controls on the excavation, but the Roman military objects in this room were all excavated in January 1932, primarily January 22 and 23, a few days after the relief was found (January 19). From the adjacent room, E7-W10, the only recorded finds were three 'bone buttons' (E1077a-c/1932.1714)

[7] E1193a/1932.1677 was identified as a 'circular locket' in (Frisch and Toll 1949, 39, no. 14)

[8] E1259/1938.2341/Guiraud no.6, a carnelian stone set in a copper alloy ring depicting a winged victory.

[9] Common wares recorded as such in the object registers of E7 are: E1169; E1231/1932.1298; E709/1932.1292; E710, E804/ 1932.1386; E847; E848/1932.1304; E944; E961/1932.134; E962; E965/1932.1638; E986; E999/1932.1302. The green-glazed vase (recorded as 'faience' in the object registers) was allotted to Damascus, E1227. A few ceramics were recorded simply as 'pottery sherds'. None of these vessels were catalogued specifically in the *Final Report* on the common wares for reasons discussed by Dyson 1968, 3.

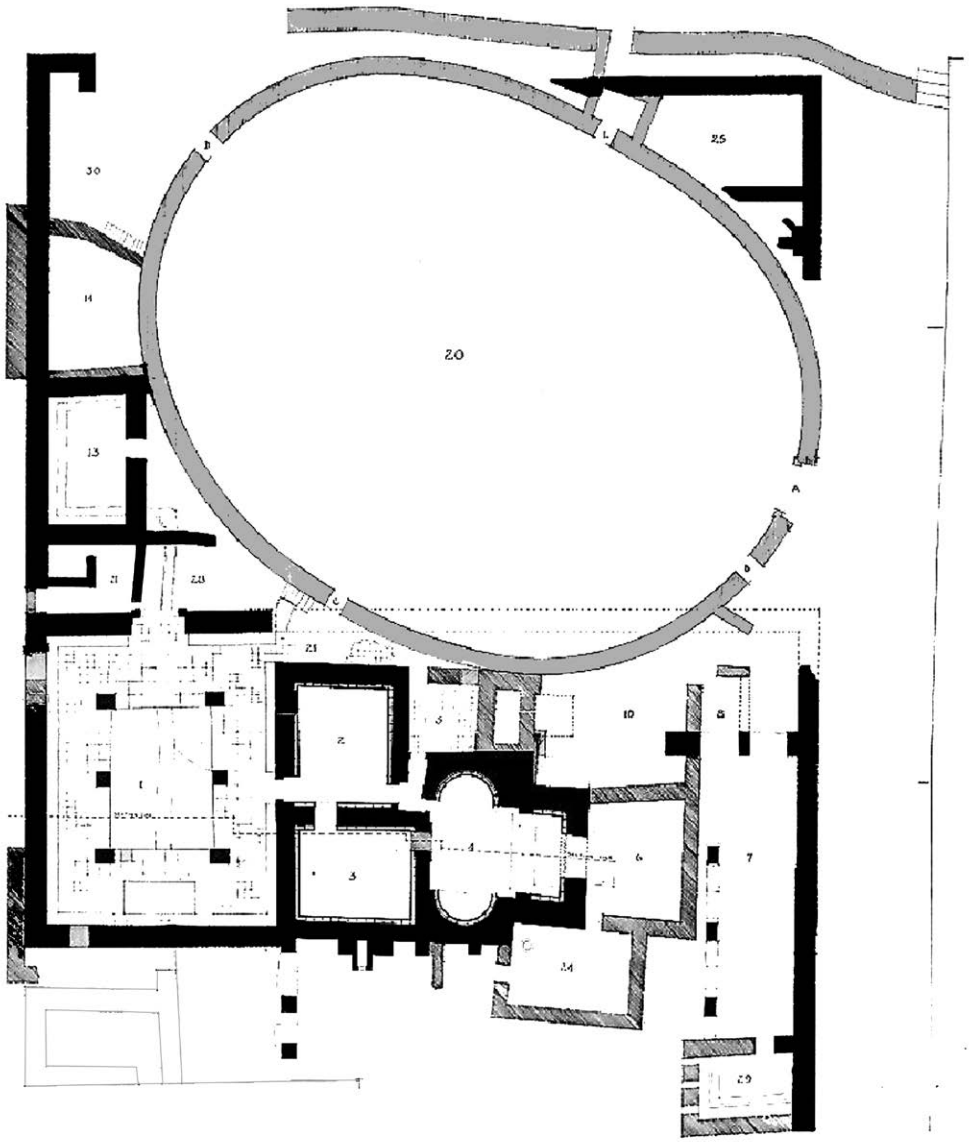


Figure 5. Plan of the F3 bath Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Archive. See now James 2019, Figure 5.10.

in number, are of similar profile to those across the site and not restricted to the military base, including Roman discus lamps, as well as types which were locally produced at Dura.[10] In sum, in this structure, used for administrative functions when taken over, at least in part, by the Roman military, there is evidence of objects reflective of a variety of identities and networks; locally produced lamps made in a Roman style, imported fine gems to seal official correspondence, and regionally produced ceramics to pour the drinks into the cups of the soldiers.

[10] From E7-W, a 'Hellenistic' lamp handle (E1171/1932.1385/Baur 1947 no.19; from E7-D9, E1195/Baur 1947 no.217, a Roman discus lamp; another discus lamp recorded as being from E7-29 (it is unclear what space on the plan this relates to), E866/Baur 1947, no.321; and from E70W5, F1134, a lamp with no typological details recorded.

## Block F3, baths and amphitheatre

Another city block of Dura-Europos which was transformed by the Roman military presence was block F3 (Figure 5), in which was built a bath building and amphitheatre. It was excavated by Frank Brown in the sixth season of work at the site, 1932-33, and published by him in a preliminary fashion shortly thereafter (Rostovtzeff *et al.* (eds) 1936, 49–83; James 2019, 109–125). The F3 baths, like other structures at Dura-Europos, was excavated in a way which precludes precision in dating, but it has tentatively been reinterpreted by James as having Trajanic origins (James 2019, 118; see also Pollard 2004). The amphitheatre, the most eastern example in the Roman empire, is more securely dated by its inscription to AD 216 (Rostovtzeff *et al.* (Eds) 1936, 76–

80, no.630 ; AE 1937, 0239; Yon and Gatier 2009, no.11), recording the construction of an *anpyteatrum* [sic] by the Legio IV Scythica and the III Cyrenaica, although the structure itself, built primarily in mudbrick, was poorly preserved even at the time of excavation.

The original report on F3, including the amphitheatre and bath together, lists only a small clutch of objects: the famed panel painting of victory (Rostovtzeff *et al.* (Eds) 1936, 63–67), and three items characterised in the report as 'minor finds': a bronze brazier, an iron sword, and 'other objects' including carved intaglios from seal rings (Rostovtzeff *et al.* (Eds) 1936, 81–83). However, the field object registers from F3 list more than 350 objects (there are 359 records, but some record clusters of artefacts, so the number is higher); 125 of those records are small finds other than coins.[11] The bath structure, like those elsewhere in the empire, had a relatively plentiful number of small finds, as small personal objects were frequently lost during the use of the facilities. Some were even specifically recorded as being found inside pipes,[12] but most recorded finds in the object registers were recorded only to the level of room in which they were found. Further complicating the contextualisation of the assemblage is the fact that some of those rooms, or locus numbers, do not appear on the extant plans, and likely refer to field notations that were not preserved in the archive or publications. Despite these problems, it is still possible to draw out some general points.

The small finds from F3 include many objects we would expect of military assemblages: fibulae,[13] seal boxes,[14] as well as fragments of armour and military equipment[15] including weapons,[16] and many small objects which were not recorded in detail but might have related (copper alloy rings, wire, nails, etc). Similarly, some objects which relate to women, such as decorated bone hairpins, were excavated: objects which would not be out of place anywhere in the Roman world (Bartus 2012), and perhaps meaning that women associated with the military community presented themselves differently to those in the civilian settlement (Baird 2016).[17]

However, in addition to those, perhaps predictable, finds, were a range of items which were likely to have been locally produced, and which indicate a perhaps less predictable aspect of the uses of the structure. Those included, again, extensive use of local pottery, with commonware pitchers being the only ceramic vessels recorded from the block.[18] Perhaps more surprising still was a range of terracotta objects, including a mould-made medallion with a bust of the god Hadad (Downey 2003, 67, no.22).[19] Downey, who studied the terracottas of the site, noticed the clustering of the objects within this building, but said only that 'It is probable that the terracottas found here...were used by soldiers' (Downey 2003, 30). From the women's objects, it is clear that it was not soldiers alone who had access to the baths, but on its own this does not explain the presence, in addition to the portrayal of Hadad, a number of animal terracottas.[20] In particular, there were quadrupeds including a camel, a ram, and horses, all small, handmade, figures, and a simple handmade rooster. None was found complete. Were these handmade animals the toys of children who lived within the base (Baird 2014, 69; Downey 2003, 15)? We cannot be certain, but from these fragments of terracottas, of women's hairpins, of local lamps and ceramics, it is nonetheless possible to begin to see a more diverse population of users of the Roman baths at Dura-Europos than simply soldiers.

## Conclusion

From these two brief case studies, even within these limited spaces which were used by the third century Roman military community at Dura-Europos, there was a variety of objects which made up the military

[11] Not all the objects were separately recorded in the object register, and some object numbers (F1068) recorded a group of objects from particular contexts, such as drains. These bulk collections from drains including carved intaglios, which were reported in the *Preliminary Report*, three of which from the drain in F3, are detailed in Guiraud's later catalogue of intaglios. Those were the carved jasper gem, catalogued in (Guiraud 1992, 70–71, no.8), which has two Yale numbers: 1933.604 and 1938.4334. Also in the bath drains were a carnelian with a carved eagle, (Guiraud 1992, 77, no.15, Yale 1933.604/1938.4333), and a carnelian depicting a Pegasus (Guiraud 1992, 74-5, no.11) Yale 1933.604b. The last of those Guiraud dates to the first century BC: if this is correct, it was presumably in use/ circulation for centuries before it was lost. Another carved gem found in a ring bezel, F853, found in the fill, was recorded in the preliminary report but not catalogued in Guiraud (Rostovtzeff *et al.* (eds) 1936, 83), '...the top half of a small bronze ring with a delicately engraved bezel...'. Such gems, of course, functioned as seals, for sealings which could be protected in the seal boxes, examples of which are also found throughout military contexts at Dura, including in the F3 baths.

[12] F1068/1933.596 from the 'centre pipe' of F3-1, the peristyle courtyard of the bath building, a collective record with a number of coins and beans.

[13] Recorded fibulae from F3: F1016e, F820e/ 1938.2006, F824a, F824b, F856/1933.2142 (enamelled bronze no.21), F860e, F1051b.

[14] As noted above, these were generally recorded in the object registers as lockets. In F3 were found at least two: F825c and F850b.

[15] F815d/1933.4261('fragments of armour'), F1166d/ 1938.3523 (James armour no. 263, a copper alloy stud), F825d/ 1938.3460 (James no. 229, a copper alloy leaf-shaped pendant), F1245 (pierced bronze no. 57, James no. 107, pierced copper alloy plate.)

[16] F1100/1933.694 (dagger), F849c/ 1933.694 (dagger blade), F877 (James no. 512, an iron longsword with chape), F495d (dagger fragment).

[17] E.g. F1051a, recorded as 'ivory and on a stick' is very likely to have been a bone hairpin; similar examples are found elsewhere on the site.

[18] F1108, from F3-25; F1800 from F3 (no more precise context is recorded), and F871 from F3-4.

[19] F1095b/1933.242b from F3-16

[20] Seven animal terracottas were recorded in the object registers as coming from the baths; four of these were catalogued by Downey: F483/1933.324d/Downey no. 148, a ram; F1940, a horse' F937/1933.311/Downey no.159, a cock; F863h/1933.323e/Downey no.133, a horse; F757c/1933.322c/Downey no.136, a camel; F483d, a camel; F1918, a horse.

assemblage. The objects, found together in structures within the military base of Dura, demonstrate clearly that life within that base was contingent not only on the arms and armour which have been taken to characterise military assemblages, but on local and regional products, that women and children, too, were likely to have been present (as elsewhere in the empire: Allison 2013, 319ff; Greene 2014; Greene 2020). Further, our ability to understand the daily lives of the inhabitants of places like Dura in the third century is enhanced by placing artefacts in their contexts (Allison 2013, 2). Those lives were ones in which both imperial and local networks of production and use were entangled, from the winged victories of a fine Roman shield to a humble common ware jug. Further, we need not look only to hybrid objects, but to hybrid practices and ways of living, if we are to understand better the diversity of life on the frontier.

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# The Men of Dura-Europos: A Demographic Profile of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*

Carol van Driel-Murray

Ever since our first meeting at one of the earliest ROMEC's in the 1980's, Simon James has, for me, always been associated with two major topics: the Roman soldier as an individual within a wider community, and Dura-Europos as a crucial site for understanding the actuality of warfare (James 1999, 2004, 2011, 2018). These threads come together in the *Papyrus Dura* 100, the subject of this paper.[1] I acknowledge that the exercise to reconstruct the demographic profile of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* is highly speculative, but Simon never shied from contentious insights, and I trust he will appreciate this attempt to illuminate aspects of military life it is difficult to get to grips with. How many men reached their 30's when they might begin to form more stable unions and think of life after service? How realistic was their hope of reaching retirement and – before 212 CE – citizenship? What sort of reception faced the new recruit? The unit, stationed at Dura from the late 2nd century till the city was finally conquered by the Sassanians *c.* 256 CE, has left an extensive body of written material, admirably published in translation (Fink 1959; 1971; Welles *et al.* 1959). As Simon James points out, the importance of these archives for the everyday workings of the Roman army cannot be exaggerated, with over half of the documents collected by Fink in his *Roman Military Records on Papyrus* (1971) coming from the various units stationed at Dura and recording hundreds of named individuals, some of whose changing careers can be followed over several years (James 2004: 5; Fink 1959: fig. 3; Gilliam 1959). In theory the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* was a milliary equitate unit, though the documents record no more than six cohorts and five *turmae*, with about 20 *dromedarii*, and a total strength estimated at around 1200 men (Fink 1959: 31; Haynes 2013: 53) (Table 1).

## The roster *P. Dura* 100

Amongst the rich and varied collection of military records found in Dura-Europos, the papyrus roll *P. Dura* 100 takes a prominent position on account of its size, completeness and subject matter. It is a unique record of the entire strength of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* drawn up in 219 CE listing all the soldiers by name and date of enlistment under the century or *turma* they served in. Though such lists must have been produced every few years in every military unit, this is the only one to survive in a form that invites analysis: nowhere else are so many named individuals serving together in the same unit recorded. Additional markings and notes next to the names indicate tasks, postings and absences, forming an important source for the workings of the unit, the number of men away from the home base and the sort of activities they were involved in (Davies 1989b: 146-7; James 2004: 16-18). Noteworthy, for instance, is the number of men escorting the newly proclaimed emperor Elagabalus on his journey to Rome (53 *pedites*, 3 *equites*), as well as the number stationed at rather distant out-posts (151 *pedites*, 43 *equites*). Some of these men were demonstrably still at these out-posts in 222 CE, though the escort was back home (Fink 1959: 41 and figs 8-9; Davies 1989b: 147). On the reverse of the papyrus is a similar roster, *P. Dura* 101, dated to 222 CE,[2] which is less complete, and for this reason I will here focus primarily on *P. Dura* 100 with incidental reference to *P. Dura* 101 for the better-preserved sections pertaining to the *equites*.

The documents have been extensively analysed and discussed but mainly in relation to military organization, pay grades, nomenclature and assumed campaigns or conflict (Fink 1959: 28-36; Gilliam 1959: 27; Kennedy 1994:92-93; Welles 1951). To my knowledge, these rosters have never been exploited as a source of demographic information even though with a simple basic assumption, the enlistment date can be converted into an approximate indication of actual age to give a demographic profile for the cohort in the year 219 CE (Figure 1).[3]

## The cohort

Despite damage, the regularity of the text entries and spacing allowed Fink (1959: 31) to estimate a total strength of *c.* 838-857 infantry, *c.*335 cavalry and 20 *dromedarii*. It is fascinating to read through these names, to speculate on their origins and cultural background (Fink 1959: 37-8; Gilliam 1965: 81-2; Welles 1951). Locals, like Themarsa, or Mazabanas, Greek or Hellenistic such as Antiochus or Heraclidas and many names familiar

[1] Henceforth referred to as *P. Dura* 100 followed by the column number given by Fink (1971).

[2] Fink 1971, 52: The date is certainly later than the fall of Elagabalus on March 13, 222.

[3] I am greatly indebted to Nathan Verstraaten (ARCHOL) for preparing the graphs.

Table 1. *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*. The commanding officers of the six centuries and five turmae, with the strength where reasonably confident (Fink 1959: 31; 1971: 15-16).

| *ordinarii* | estimated strength | *decuriones* | estimated strength |
|---|---|---|---|
| Danymus | | Zebidas | 61 |
| Marcus | 140 | Tiberinus | 66 |
| Antoninus | | Demetrius | 68 |
| Castricius | | Octavius | 73 |
| Marianus | 146 | Antoninus | 66 |
| Malchianus | 144 | | |

Table 2. Specimen of the entries in *P. Dura*. 100.xxi.1-11, century of Marianus (adapted and simplified, after Fink 1971: 31).

| Rank (if noted) | | Name | Consulate | Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Century of Marianus | Divo Antonino ii cos | 205 |
| Ordinarius | aurel | iulius marianus | | |
| | | | Geta senior ii cos | 203 |
| Duplicarius | aurel | iulius apolinarius | | |
| | | | Cilone ii cos | 204 |
| Sesqu | aurel | lucius themarsa | | |
| | | | Comodo vii cos | 192 |
| | aurel | abdas themarsa | | |
| | | | Erucio claro cos | 193 |
| | ....] | ]iadaeus ierhaei | | |
| | ....] | ...th... malchi | | |
| | | | Tertullo cos | 195 |
| | ....] | ierh[aeu]s barnaei | | |
| *ETC.* | | | | |

from tombstones in north western Europe – Longinus, Flavius, no fewer than 13 called Bassus, and it is nice to see Barates, a name familiar to all those in the Newcastle region.[4] We meet many of these men again three years later in *P. Dura* 101, but by then the infantry had been reduced to *c.* 744-768 men, the cavalry to *c.* 250, while the *dromedarii* had been increased to 35 (Fink 1959: 30-31). The fluctuating numbers of men per century/*turma* and the non-standard composition of the cohort has been the source of much inconclusive discussion (Fink 1959: 30-31; Gilliam 1959: 27; Haynes 2013: table 3.1). Whatever the reason for the irregularities may be, the general impression left by the archive is that the organization of Roman army units was in fact highly flexible and able to adjust to local circumstances whatever the theoretical norms might dictate (Haynes 2013: 53).

## Method

The texts have been transcribed and edited by Fink (1959; 1971), with discussions and annotations by Gilliam: these editions form an outstanding source of data pertaining to the unit, its men, its officers and its history (Fink 1959; 1971; Gilliam 1959; 1965). I have based my counts on the text edition of Fink (1971), but have excluded the century of Danymus, since this part of the roll is fragmentary and uncertain (Table 5). My totals differ somewhat from those presented by Fink (1959: 34, fig. 5), in part because he combines *P. Dura* 100 and *P. Dura* 101, but also because I have occasionally opted for dates based on likelihood, given the overall recruitment pattern. I arrive at 839 recognizable records where the enlistment date is certain, a total that can be increased by including around 110 records attributable to a wider date range for a clustered diagram such as Figure 2.

To give a flavour of the entries, Tables 2 and 3 shows the start of Marianus' century (*P. Dura* 100.xxi) and a section from the century of Marcus (*P. Dura* 100.viii). Arranged by century or *turma* and headed by their officers, the men are listed in order of seniority under the consular

[4] Intriguingly, there are nine men named Germanus, the only such 'ethnic' name, among them three Iulii, a Gaius and an Aelius. This casts a different light on the presence of Aucissa fibulae and a central European shield boss in Dura, that may have been valued heirlooms (Baird 2014: 264 and n. 248; James 2004:174, fig. 95, 608; Zieling 1989: 72, type D2).

Table 3. Specimen of the entries in *P. Dura* 100.vii.31-viii.16, century of Marcus (adapted and simplified, after Fink 1971: 21-22).

| Rank (if noted) | | Name | Consulate | Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Century of Marcus | | |
| | | | Apro et maximo cos | 207 |
| | aurel | zenodorus artemidori | | |
| | aurel | bass[ | | |
| | aurel | priscus ..[ | | |
| | | | Pompeiano cos | 209 |
| | aurel | abdas zebida | | |
| | | | Faustinino cos | 210 |
| | aurel | quintus iulianus | | |
| | aurel | iulius menandrus | | |
| | aurel | malchus bel[ | | |
| | aurel | antonius cle[men.. | | |
| | | | duobus aspris cos | 212 |
| | aurel | claudius tiberinus | | |
| | aurel | ieraboles udathi | | |
| | aurel | ulpius antoninus | | |
| | aurel | antoninus hia[.. | | |
| | | amaeus zebida | | |
| *ETC.* | | | | |

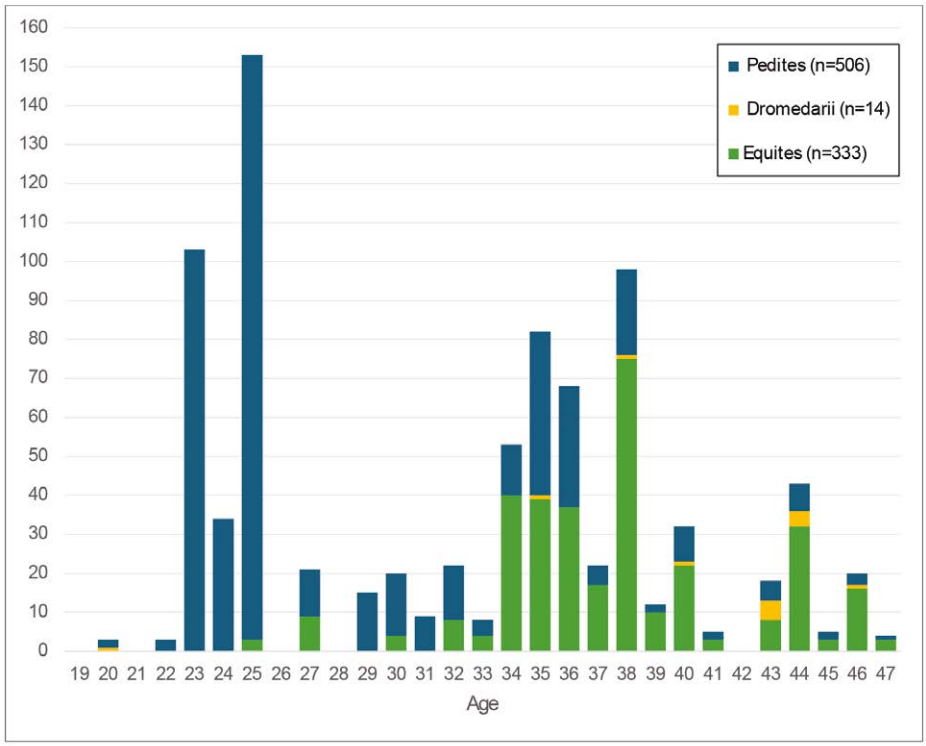


Figure 1. Age profile of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* from *P. Dura* 100, equites, pedites and dromedarii, excluding the century of Danymus.

year of enlistment. The enlistment date served as an identity-tag for each soldier throughout his career and was clearly of paramount importance to every man.[5] Some names are exceptionally popular – for example, four men are called Ieraeus Zebida, and no fewer than nine Iulius Marinus – but they are only distinguished by additions such as 'alter' or 'posterior' if men of the same year served in the same century or *turma* (thus in the century of Castricius, Iulius Prior, Iulius Posterior (*214*)). Following the *Constitutio Antoniniana* almost all men are given the prefix Aurel[ius], even though some already possessed citizenship. In the second document, of 222 CE, this practice is largely discontinued (Gilliam 1965: 85-6).

## The age of recruitment

From the analysis of large numbers of inscriptions bearing information on both age and length of service, both Davies and Scheidel conclude that men entered the Roman army at around 20 years of age, with the length of military service being more accurately recorded than the biological age, where a rounding is more prevalent (Davies 1989a; Scheidel 1996:100-109, fig. 3.2; Lavan 2019: 46 note 131). The Dura records illustrate clearly why this should be so: the enlistment date was integral to the man's military identity throughout his life, while his actual biological age – even if accurately known – was probably less important than perceived physical maturity when enlisting. Though we may not be able to say with certainty that Malchus Anani (*193*), from the century of Antoninus, was exactly 46 years old and should have retired, or that Zabde (*217*) from the century of Malchianus was 22, this assumption, given the high number of available records, is an acceptable basis on which to proceed. To generate the figures presented here, 20 is added to the recorded recruitment date to give the approximate age of the men serving in the unit in 219 (Figure 1), and for those in the cavalry in both 219 and 222 CE (Figures 3 and 4). The figures are presented in Table 5 (appendix) and should a different age of enlistment be preferred they can be adjusted accordingly.

## The age profile of the cohort

Figure 1 shows the age profile at 219 CE in so far as the record allows. The pattern of recruitment in alternating years, and the occasional discharge of men long after their term have drawn comment, but other than the remarkable distinction between the younger infantry and the older cavalry (discussed below), the actual age structure of the unit has not. Every 10 years or so there is a concerted recruitment campaign over a few years (195, 201-205, 214-216 CE), separated by longer periods of low replacement. Such peaks have often been regarded as indicators of preparations for, or involvement in, military campaigns, though as Kennedy points out, the underlying pattern of recruitment is dependent on the discharge of veterans after 25 years of service and results in a 'wave' pattern of short bouts of high intake followed by a pause and rising again slowly as casualties and natural attrition increase (Kennedy1994: 92). Although this does to an extent accord with the course of the Dura graph, it is evident that enrolment was also influenced by other factors, as *P. Dura* 101 shows that only 17 new men replaced the 69 who had reached retirement age between 219 and 222 CE: possibly the unit was gearing up for a major recruitment drive in 224/226, but it is also feasible that the cohort was well over strength and was being run down to a more 'normal' size. The overall 'wave' pattern obscures considerable variation in detail as will be discussed below for the *equites* and also complicates the interpretation of the seven discharge documents known (Scheidel 1996: Table 3.12). Pragmatic concerns probably lie behind the fluctuations in recruitment between centuries: in 204 CE the centurions Marcus, Malchianus and Marianus had no new men at all, but Antoninus and Castricius welcomed 17 and 25 new recruits respectively, while in 215 CE Antoninus and Marcus each had just one new man, Malchianus only two, but Marianus got 10 and Castricius 18.

Taken as a whole, however, the cohort differs profoundly from the implicit assumption of the Roman army as a body of overwhelmingly young men (Figure 2). Despite the substantial influx of young men in 214/15 CE, only 40% of the cohort was under 30, 44% was aged over 35, with 14% over 40. However, given the wave pattern of discharge and recruitment, these percentages would fluctuate strongly as peak intake years like 201-203 CE moved up towards retirement (see Figure 4). This makes it difficult to generalize or to predict the demographic course in following years, but it does underline the fact that military service for a Roman soldier was a life-time commitment, giving a very different perspective to that of men in more recent armies who tend to serve on shorter contracts.

What sort of community did the raw recruits of 219 CE enter? That year, only three men were added: the two fresh infantrymen would be 3-5 years younger than their messmates, but the single new *dromedarius* must have viewed his companions with dismay. Not one was under 35. For the 250-300 men who had arrived between 214-216 CE, the situation would have been quite different: even though much of the unit would still have been appreciably older, they formed a sufficiently large body of young men to give one another support, evening out the age structure of the unit. Simon James has drawn attention to the importance of mutual support

[5] In the following, the recruitment date will be given in italic whenever a specific individual is named.

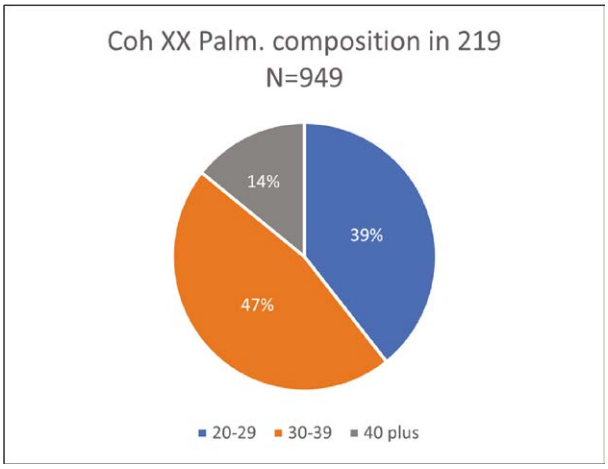


Figure 2. Relative proportion of men aged 20-29, 30-39 and over 40.

in the socialization of new recruits but unfortunately, there is no information in the Dura documents on how individual *contubernia* were formed, whether they were deliberately mixed in age, or essentially formed of contemporaries (James 1999: 16-17). The substitution of men with the same date of enlistment, discussed below, does seem to indicate some care in maintaining an age balance, at least within a century or *turma.*

For the surrounding community in the town of Dura Europos, however, these fluctuations in enlistment numbers might alter the precarious balance between soldier and civilian. Younger men are likely to be unattached, more likely to frequent taverns and sex workers, more prone to violence: a picture familiar from any modern garrison town (James 2006: 33-34; 2018: 44-45). Military discipline was always problematical, but age and the establishment of ties of family and friends might affect the propensity to mutiny or to follow a commander in a bid for the Principate (James 1999: 15). As Margaret Roxan (1991) and Sara Phang (2002) have shown, soldiers began to form more stable unions in their 30's: potentially, in Dura over half of the unit's strength (Figure 2). But by 225/6 CE the retirement of the high intake of 201-205 CE would result in an influx of young men, radically changing the demographics of the previous decade, and thus the relationship with the urban inhabitants.[6]

## The age structure of the *equites*

The records for the cavalry are relatively complete and starkly reveal the skewed age structure (Figure 1). Most men are over 34 years of age and recruitment tails off to a mere handful after 205 CE, leading Gilliam, the

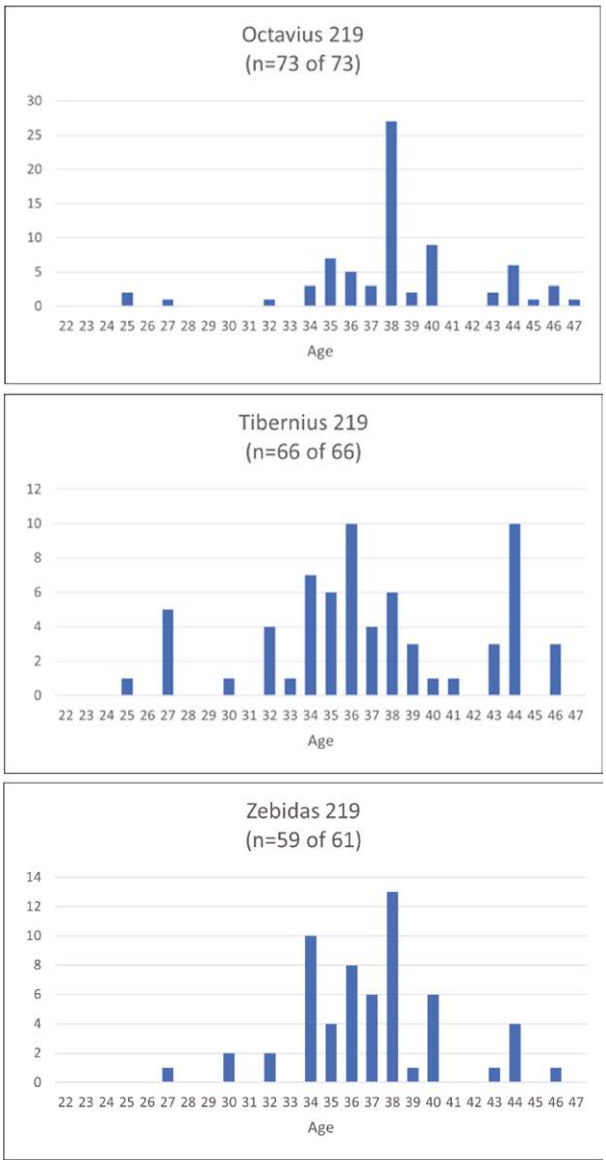


Figure 3. The men of the turmae of Zebidas, Tiberinus and Octavius in 219 CE.

first to comment on this phenomenon, to conclude that the *equites* were promoted from the *pedites* after about a decade of service (1965: 73-78). Though this is generally accepted (Davies 1989b; Haynes 2013: 81), the explanation is not entirely satisfactory since it does not account for the complete lack of new men after 214 CE, nor for the difference in recruitment pattern between *pedites* and *equites*, where the alternating years' intake is far less pronounced (Figures 1 and 3). Furthermore, a comparison of the two documents, *P. Dura* 100 and *P. Dura* 101, reveals only one case of the possible promotion of an infantryman: Aurelius Azizus (*214*) from the century of Marianus to the *turma* of Demetrius (*P. Dura* 101.xxv.6; *P. Dura* 101.xxxviii.18). The names of two others, Demetrius (*216*) and Marinus (*214*) are too common for certainty but even these instances do not fully explain the lack of promotion opportunities for

[6] If the numbers were kept to 219 AD level, potentially bringing the number of under 30's to about 500 as against about 330 in 219: but this is pure speculation, not taking account of casualties or natural attrition.


Figure 4. The shift in age structure in the equites between 219 and 222 CE.

men recruited after 205 CE. An interesting exception is the high-flyer Ulpius Gaianus, one of only three who entered the *equites* in 214 CE: three years later he had made it to *sesquiplicarius* in the same *turma*. (*P. Dura* 100. xl.23; *P. Dura* 101.xxxviii.25).

Mass promotion seems particularly hard on the few men passed over – seven of the 32 recruits of 195 CE and only two of the 12 recruits of 200 CE failed to be promoted: was this a sign of ill-health or incompetence? A closer analysis of all the names in both documents might shed more light on the issue of promotion and transfer, but if promotion from infantry to cavalry was the normal procedure in such units, the *Cohors IX Batavorum milliaria equitata* at Vindolanda will have shown a similar transfer out of the ranks, with the cavalry forming an appreciably older body of men. This is perhaps something to bear in mind when discussing the contents of the Vindolanda letters. A recruitment pause might be regarded as a deliberate policy to rebalance the unit by reducing cavalry numbers, although this does seem a rather drastic measure and militarily unsound on such a volatile frontier line (Fink 1959: 30-31). Nevertheless, though the *equites* might have been getting on in years, their physical strength must be admired: there were 87 men over 40, and

Table 4. Specimen comparison of the two documents: turma of Tiberinus. Males Macchana was transferred from the turma of Zebidas, replacing Ulpius Demetrius, and Mocimus Barnei (brother of Dometius?) replaces ....]mus Marini. Note the differences in spellings.

| *P. Dura* 100 | Consulate | Year | *P. Dura* 101 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | muciano cos | 201 | |
| marcus maior | | | marcus maior |
| malchus themarsa | | | aurel malchus themarsa |
| ulpius demetrius | | | males macchana *(transferred from Zebidas)* |
| belacabus abgari | | | belacabus abgari |
| iulius scaurianus | | | iulius scaurianus |
| flavius monimus | | | flavius monimus |
| | divu severo iii cos | 202 | |
| dometius barnaei | | | domittius barnei |
| ....]mus marini | | | mocimus barnei |
| barbaessamen | | | Barbaessamen |
| ...s the..[... | | | |

between 219 and 222 CE there are hardly any losses, other than regular retirement after 25 years' service (Figure 4).

Broken down by *turma,* the wide variation in age structure within the overall pattern becomes evident (Figures 3). While the turmae of Zebidas, Demetrius and Antoninus have a broadly similar distribution, Tiberinus has a wider age range, while Octavius is dominated by men enlisted in 201 CE (in any case a high intake year). Such differences may indeed reflect the dangers of frontier life since conflict (as well as disease) will inevitably lead to increased recruitment (or transfers) to keep up numbers. Conversely, in more restful times recruitment may be postponed and men might be transferred to more pressing arenas. Such fluctuations might be reflected in the somewhat irregular nature of the cohort, but as *P. Dura* 100 and 101 are the only such documents available we can only register the situation at this point of time.

## Equites: losses through death or transfer

Comparison between *P. Dura* 100 of 219 and *P. Dura* 101 of 222 CE shows that most men of the cohort due for retirement after 25 years' service had indeed been discharged, 69 in total (enlisted between 193-197 CE). For the cohort, it is evident that some men served longer: four men enlisted in 192 CE were still recorded in 219 and there were even more veterans still in service in 222 CE. Only four men recruited in 219 appear in *P. Dura* 101, though several men enlisted in earlier years are added to the force. That the actual number of discharges at this point is small is attributable to the 'wave' pattern of replacement: this was a low phase, and would be followed by a major renewal somewhere around 224/226 CE (Figure 1). But as is apparent from Figure 4, the marked reduction in the size of all the *turmae* is almost entirely due to the failure to compensate for the natural course of retirement, and not to mortality (as is also the case for the centuries). Indeed, almost all the gains for the entire cohort in *P. Dura* 101 are transfers of men enlisted well before 222 CE: where these came from is unclear, but most must presumably have been brought in from other units. Since both documents list names in the same order, other losses can be traced through comparison of the individual *turmae* (Table 4). Of the 33 *equites* enrolled between 196-199 CE, only Valeras Quirini (*P. Dura 100*.xxxiv.11), Amrus Milens (*P. Dura 100*.xxxvii.26) and Marinus (*P. Dura 100*.xxxviii.34) apparently didn't make it to 222 CE.

Apart from the *equites* honourably discharged, there is a further loss of 46 men from the five *turmae* between 219 and 222 CE, several of whom were certainly still alive, having been transferred to another *turma*, and there was clearly a lively exchange of men between units (Fink 1959: 35, fig. 7). Many names are too fragmentary for identification, but at least three men were certainly transferred within the unit to the *turma* of Tiberinus, indicating that men recorded in 219 CE but absent in 222 CE are not necessarily casualties. Furthermore, as at least three officers are involved, promotion elsewhere is a further possibility. That these losses are often concentrated in a single enlistment year (particularly 201 and 203 CE) also suggests block transfers or promotions rather than the hand of fate, though if *contubernia* were formed of men enlisting at the same time, such losses might indeed reflect disastrous engagements.

In the case of the *turma* of Octavius: there are six losses in the generation of 201 CE, with no replacements. But by 222 Ulpius Gaianus (*214*) has been promoted to *sesquiplicarius* and his place in the roster is taken by Abidsalma[ Themarsa, also enlisted in 214 CE. Similar gaps appear in the *turma* of Antoninus for the generation

203 CE, but as one of the four losses has been transferred to the *turma* of Tiberinus, the others may also have been transfers and not deaths. Or is this a case of a sole survivor being placed amongst sympathetic companions? It is noticeable that men no longer recorded on *P. Dura* 101 have often been directly replaced by another man, sometimes from anther *turma* or century, but with the same enlistment date. The new man slips into place between his companions, a direct replacement in age and seniority of the dead, transferred or dismissed soldier. It is possible that some of the direct swaps reflect internal pressures with individuals being moved for personal reasons to maintain peace and discipline, but overall, it looks as though a new equilibrium was being sought, shifting men around from over-strength units whilst maintaining the age and seniority balance within units.

### How realistic was the expectation of reaching *honesta missio*?

By 222 CE most of those recruited before 196 CE had left, either dead or discharged. In this interval, however, relatively few of the men of the 196-200 CE generation recorded in *P. Dura* 100 have disappeared from the list in *P. Dura 101* and as noted above, several of these losses are in fact transfers. This period is in any case one of low recruitment and it is particularly unfortunate that we do not possess the records of 224/226 CE, when the recruiting peak of 204/6 was coming up for discharge and the life chances of a larger group of men would become clearer. Nevertheless, a higher mortality might have been expected, especially in the over-40's, given the rather dire predictions offered by idealized demographic calculations (Scheidel 1996:118, figs 3.22, 3.23; James 2006: 33). From the Dura record, it would appear that even in an active conflict zone, men in their late 30's could look to reaching retirement with reasonable confidence: in 219 CE some 14% of the unit might be anticipating (or like Abdas Themarsa (*192*), who was still on the books after 28 years' service, dreading) civilian life (Figure 4).

### The *cohors equitata* as an integrated force

If Gilliam's analysis of the relationship between infantry and cavalry in a *cohors equitata* is correct, the *pedites* and the *equites* must have formed a far more integrated force with a less strict division between foot and mounted men than the modern terminology suggests. Infantry cannot simply be promoted to cavalry and these men must also have been riders, if not with their own horse or the extra pay, as Davis recognized (1989b). Thus, the infantry of a *cohors equitata* would in fact be capable of generalized mounted duties, such as patrols, reconnaissance and escorting supplies or people, with the most suitable men eventually being promoted to full cavalry status and receiving a designated mount (Davies 1989c; 276, n. 21). The *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* was therefore a highly mobile multi-purpose unit, well suited to patrolling the steppe hinterland of the extensive Euphrates frontier line with its numerous out-posts (Fink 1959: 44, fig. 8; Davies 1989b: 147; James 2004: 19-20 and fig. 3). Such an integrated force would require many more horses than the standard estimate of about 120-200 for the *equites* alone, in turn increasing the demand for stabling, fodder and grazing land (Davies 1989c; Hyland 1990: 89).

For men from families or communities not intimately acquainted with horsemanship from an early age, the *cohors equitata* offered an opportunity for cavalry training and the promise of promotion: in contrast with the slim chances of reaching officer status, two thirds of the men recruited between 192 and 205 CE had already been advanced. Service in a *cohors equitata* may thus be seen as an opening for less well-situated men to better themselves and any recruit would be honing his riding skills in the hope of early promotion. For the favoured few after 5-10 years' service, but with an excellent chance of making it to *equites* by the age of 33. At this point the man received higher pay, enabling him to support a servant or family (unless the ration was intended for his personal mount). Thus, in their early 30's men might start to make plans for their future, with the resources to do so. At this point, too, he would see that about 47 % of his companions were older than he and could assess his chances of reaching retirement accordingly. This either gave him confidence or the realization that if he valued some form of family life, he'd better get a move on. Whatever the conclusion, few men could afford to wait until retirement to begin thinking of starting a family if they wanted to benefit from the support of their offspring in their old age.

### Conclusion

It must be emphasised that this exercise is limited to the age distribution in 219 CE and presents no more than a snapshot. The gap of three years between the two document is too short for a realistic assessment of life chances, while the frequency of transfers obscures actual mortality. Nevertheless, this is the evidence as it stands: increasingly sophisticated statistical analysis cannot mask the fragile basis for ancient demographic estimates, the tiny datasets, the heavy cultural bias of tombstones or underlying regional and chronological trends (Hope 2001). The Dura roster lists over 900 identifiable men, all alive at this moment of time and conveniently arranged by consular year of enlistment. This offers a unique demographic profile of a living population, in stark contrast to the dead individuals recorded on tombstones, with their socially conditioned messages: here we see the mass of ordinary soldiers. Far from being a reservoir of young, unattached men, about half the unit was over 35, and losses seem low for a cohort that saw active campaigning on a highly

contested frontier: anyone reaching 40 had a fair chance of reaching retirement. Somewhat surprising is the store set on maintaining enlistment groups of a similar age, and the degree to which transfers re-distributed men both within and outside the *Cohors*. The *cohors equitata* appears as an integrated, multi-purpose unit, composed of infantry in the process of training for full cavalry status, and thus largely mounted, or at least capable of riding. Whatever the reservations concerning this exercise may be and however unusual or idiosyncratic the garrison was, these are the men who populated the streets of Dura-Europos, and patrolled the Euphrates frontier: fortunately for them, few would have lived to witness the dramatic fall of the city to the Sassanians *c.*256 CE, so vividly reconstructed by Simon James (James 2004: 24; 2011).

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## Appendix

Table 5. *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, basic count with date of enlistment and corresponding age estimate for the unit, equites, pedites and dromedarii.

| Age | Date AD | Equites | dromedarii | pedites | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 47 | 192 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| 46 | 193 | 16 | 1 | 3 | 20 |
| 45 | 194 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| 44 | 195 | 32 | 4 | 7 | 43 |
| 43 | 196 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 18 |
| 42 | 197 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 41 | 198 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| 40 | 199 | 22 | 1 | 9 | 32 |
| 39 | 200 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 12 |
| 38 | 201 | 75 | 1 | 22 | 98 |
| 37 | 202 | 17 | 0 | 5 | 22 |
| 36 | 203 | 37 | 0 | 31 | 68 |
| 35 | 204 | 39 | 1 | 42 | 82 |
| 34 | 205 | 40 | 0 | 13 | 54 |
| 33 | 206 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 8 |
| 32 | 207 | 8 | 0 | 14 | 22 |
| 31 | 208 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 9 |
| 30 | 209 | 4 | 0 | 16 | 20 |
| 29 | 210 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 15 |
| 28 | 211 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 27 | 212 | 9 | 0 | 12 | 21 |
| 26 | 213 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 25 | 214 | 3 | 0 | 150 | 153 |
| 24 | 215 | 0 | 0 | 34 | 34 |
| 23 | 216 | 0 | 0 | 103 | 103 |
| 22 | 217 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| 21 | 218 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 20 | 219 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 19 | 220 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | | 333 | 14 | 506 | 854 |

# Ceramics and Social Practice on Roman Military Sites

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## Introduction

This paper concerns peopling Roman military sites and how we might use the pottery found at such sites for greater understandings of socio-cultural practices in these contexts. Here I bring together aspects of my previous research into artefact assemblages and gendered and social practices at Roman military sites in Germany with my current research into Roman pottery, particularly *terra sigillata*.

## Artefact analyses and gendered identities in Roman military sites

Roman military bases, like Pompeian houses (see Allison 2004, 2006a, 2009a), are purported to have fairly systematic and well understood spatial arrangements for identifying patterns of socio-spatial practice. However, the distribution of artefacts around Roman military sites can give us greater insights into gendered and social practices at these sites (e.g. Allison 2006b, 2008, 2009b, 2013).

Investigating gendered behaviour at Roman military sites through artefact analysis involves engagement with feminist theory which has come late to Roman military studies. That said, there has recently been an increasing amount of research in this area, much of which has focussed on gender and identity, using epigraphical and pictorial evidence (e.g. Allason-Jones 1999; Greene 2013; Carroll 2015), rather than the artefact evidence (although see van Driel Murray 1995, 1998). In this regard, these studies follow the most fruitful area of the archaeology of gender which concerns evidence with 'direct references to human bodies' (Sørenson 2006: 28), and to gendered 'bodies' (see e.g. Kleiner and Matheson 2000; Berg 2002). The artefactual evidence is much less direct but the rich documentary and burial record from the Roman world provides us with much information that can help us to investigate gendered behaviour in this world (see e.g. Allason-Jones, van Driel-Murray and Greene 2020), and also to 'gender' Roman artefacts (see Allison 2015a). As with other studies of gender and the Roman military, my own artefact studies have focussed essentially on demonstrating the presence of women and children at these sites. While this approach has been critiqued for its focus on finding 'biologically defined identit[ies]' (Tomášková 2006: 21), a reluctance among some Roman military scholars to accept that women and children would have been major contributors to the communities inside Roman military bases has persisted (e.g. Reuter 2008). I have focussed on analyses of artefacts found inside early imperial military bases that could be most easily 'gendered'. In the Roman world, the 'safest' (see Casella 2006), although by no means conclusive, way to do this is through items associated with dress which is, or is assumed to be, clearly gendered in much of the Roman world (see Allison 2015b).

Besides items of dress, though, other artefacts, and ecofacts, found within military bases that can also be relatively safely associated with the presence of women are remains associated with very young children, both artefactual and infant skeletal remains. While, Simon James (2006: 34-36), among others, has argued that one cannot discount the possibility of children as slaves in military contexts, this cannot be the case for neo-natal remains found buried within and associated with soldiers' barracks in the fort at Ellingen in Germany (Schöter 1992: 305-306; see also Allison 2008: 125-126), and also in other early imperial forts dating before the official ban on soldier marriage was reportedly lifted by Septimius Severus (e.g. at the 1st-cent legionary fortress of Vindonissa: Trumm and Fellman Brogi 2008: 106–10). We can safely assume that the communities inside the walls of Roman forts or fortresses, before and after this official ban, included families of soldiers and possibly other women and children who contributed to these military communities.

## Artefact analyses and gendered practices

Concern for gendered labour division has dominated much literature on the archaeology of gender (e.g. Nelson 1997: 86; Senior 2000: 71; Casella 2006: 26). One task that would seem to be a fairly exclusively female task in the Roman world, for which artefacts can be easily identified, is spinning (Allison 2006b: 5-6; 2013: 94; 2015b: 113). While cloth production more broadly – e.g. weaving and needlework – could also be undertaken by men in the Roman civilian world, documentary sources (i.e. Vegetius 1, 7) suggest that, for weaving at least this is less likely in military contexts (for references: Allison 2013: 93-94). Lyndsay Allason-Jones previously argued for soldiers doing needlework in military contexts (1988; 1995: 27–28), on the assumption that these were essentially male-only communities. In my studies of gender and space in the Roman military world, I used the presence and distribution of cloth-production

artefacts inside Roman military sites, and most notably spinning items, to add further weight to arguments that women were active participants in the communities inside Roman military bases.

But if women were having babies, spinning and possibly weaving and mending inside Roman military bases, what else were they doing? I have used the spatial distribution of female dress-related artefacts inside the legionary fortress of Vetera I and the supply fort at Oberstimm to suggest that they were involved in commercial activities (Allison 2013: 330-332), and at Oberstimm and Rottweil in industrial activities (Allison 2013: 328-330), inside these military bases. The epigraphical and artefactual evidence at Vindonissa, which identifies a female innkeeper opposite the baths inside the fortress (e.g. Speidel 1996: 38, 55, 80, 186–7; 1997) indicates that women provided food and drink, and possibly entertainment inside this legionary fortress. As discussed below, the finds distribution at Vetera I and the fort at Oberstimm suggest the same thing.

My studies of female-related activities inside military sites have been based on very limited artefactual evidence. However, there is also limited artefactual evidence for identifying male-related activities – of combatants or non-combatants – inside Roman military sites, without preconceived ideas about how these sites operated.

## Ceramics and gendered practice

Every Roman site, whether civilian or military, has a wealth of ceramic remains. In rapidly abandoned sites, or sites with dirt floor living spaces, these ceramics can be found in or close to their context of end use. So, can we often use this wealth of ceramic remains and their contexts to better understand the spatial, or even gendered, distribution of social practices inside military bases?

Most studies of Roman ceramics have focussed on production and trade and we are fairly well-informed about these aspects of the ubiquitous *terra sigillata* (e.g. Mees 2007; 2018; Willet 2014; Polak 2017). We may know less about the gender of the potters who stamped their names on this pottery than we think, however. Many of the stamps on the bases of *terra sigillata* do not have evidence for the full male *trinomina* or gendered suffixes verify the sex of the potter (see e.g. Zanier 1992 plate 60; Allison 2006: fig. 83). Nevertheless, many incomplete stamps are transcribed as male potters and masculine suffixes assumed (see e.g. Zanier 1992: 219-221 and plate 60). Some stamps could conceivably comprise female names (e.g. 'ATVSSA' or 'ATVSA' – Polak 2000: 173-174 no. A96;[1] 'LICCAE' – Ettlinger *et al.* 1990: 72 no. 12.5.2; '... OMA' – Zanier 1992: 221 no. 43).[2] Assumptions that the stamps record male potters concurs with a widely-held perception that when women are the pot makers this is a domestic activity and these pots would be crudely made, but when it is a skilled craft or industry, such as for *terra sigillata*, pot making would have been carried out by men (see Sørenson 2000: 17; see also discussion by Blinkhorn 1997; 113).

Based on anthropological and ethnographic studies indicating that men were generally responsible for 'wheel-thrown mass-produced pottery' and that women were usually the makers of handmade pottery, Carol van Driel Murray has argued for the movement of ethnic women as pottery makers and pottery users in military contexts (van Driel Murray 2009: 816-817). She argued that the distinctive handmade pottery at forts in the Taunus region was similar in shape, technique and decoration to that from Northern Germany because it was made, and used, by women who moved from there with their soldier partners. Her former student, José Peeters, also demonstrated that the mineralogical analyses of the fabric, of Housesteads ware indicate that it was made in northern Britain, but the forms and technology had no similarities with British pottery (see van Driel Murray 2009: 817-819). Van Driel Murray argued that this handmade pottery again indicated that foreign, Friesian, women as active participants in these northern British military communities. These arguments for women as the makers and users of handmade pottery should not necessarily exclude them as craftspeople working in more highly organised pottery industries, such as the *terra sigillata* industry, however. A woman depicted painting vases in an Athenian pottery workshop is a vivid illustration that women could indeed carry out highly skilled pottery-making tasks in the ancient Greco-Roman world (Kehrberg 1982).

For the seemingly well-organised *terra sigillata* industry, we can perhaps draw a parallel with the brick industry outside Rome. A considerable number of Roman brick stamps, dating from the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD, bear women's names (Anderson 1997: 158-159; Setälä 1997) and indicate of their various roles and positions in the brick-manufacturing industry. Female brick factories owners (*dominae*) include the names of aristocratic women, sometimes of the highest ranks and sometimes owning several brick factories. Women's names also occur on these stamps as the actual brick manufacturers (*officinatores*) (Setälä 1997: 21, 51) and

[1] My thanks to Daniël van Helden for this reference.
[2] This stamp would seem to definitely end in 'A' rather than an 'F' as in the alternative suggestion for the transcription.

as brick sellers (*negotiatores*) (e.g. Setälä 1997: 50), often being freedwomen or slaves. This example shows that we are by no means clear about labour gendered task division in industry in the Roman civilian sphere and that we need to take this into consideration for the military sphere.

However, my interest is not so much in pottery makers but in pottery users. In recent decades, across the archaeological discipline, there has been increasing focus on food and material culture (e.g. Steel and Zinn 2016). Eating and drinking are crucial areas of social behaviour framing daily interactions in all societies. My research has focussed on material culture and specifically the role of Roman ceramics in food consumption.

We have a fairly good understanding of the general uses of the various types of Roman pottery. We consider vessels of coarser utilitarian fabrics as vessels used variously for the transport, storage and cooking of foodstuffs, according to their fabric, form and evidence of use (see. e.g. Dyson 1976; Cool 2006: 15-21, 37-50; Banducci 2014). That said, some such vessels have been reused or even have a primary use for other activities (e.g. amphorae reused as urinals or for building material: see Allison 2006a: 17; for actual use as chamber pots: Pegurri and Nunziante Cesaro 2023). Vessels of finer fabrics are generally considered tablewares for the eating, drinking and serving foodstuffs, often substantiated by their forms (see e.g. Cool 2006: esp. 51-55, 193-199).

So, finewares are the most essential evidence we have for investigating the socio-cultural practices around eating and drinking across the Roman world, even if some vessels in these fabrics may have been used in activities more closely related to food processing, and coarser fabrics might be used for food consumption. That is, clear divisions of specific pottery fabrics according to general functional categories cannot necessarily be taken for granted. A case in point here are the highly polished, but thermally resistant wares – the so-called 'Pompeian Redware' and related types – that are widely assumed to be for cooking food but would also appear to have been used for serving that cooked food and even eating it from (see Allison 2009a: 21-23; Bermejo Tirado 2018: Section 3, fig. 2). In my brief study of Pompeian Redware I focussed on the sizes and forms of the vessels as indications of their particular use, rather than the fabric alone. And the existence of *terra sigillata mortaria* (Willis 2004: Section 8.4) indicates that we have been rather simplistic in our division of pottery use by fabric. As the studies of Jesus Bermejo Tirado show, form rather than fabric *per se* often gives an indication of vessel use (Bermejo Tirado 2018; forthcoming). Essentially, we should be wary of separating food-related material culture from the ancient world along the lines of modern western European foodways.

While we might use the physical and morphological characteristics of Roman pottery, as well as fabric, to ascribe a generalised use category to a particular vessel, this does not tell us much about who was using what pottery, where and how. Some great work was done by Vivien Swan on the ethnicity of pottery users and what this tells us about the types of cooking practices carried out at military sites in the northern provinces (1992; 2009 Section I). Certainly, more detailed investigations of cooking vessels can potentially give us greater insights into the ethnicity, and possibly also the sex (van Driel Murray 2009), of people who may have moved around the Roman world and taken their foodways with them.

## Recording finewares to investigate food-consumption practices

With my interest in food consumption, I have focussed on the tableware *par excellence*, *terra sigillata* (see Willis 1997: 39). The millions of *terra sigillata* remains, and local imitations, excavated from archaeological sites across the Roman world since the 18th century, comprise the most extensive body of material-culture from across this vast world for insights into social practices surrounding food- and drink consumption among the very different socio-cultural groups that made up this world. In addition, the relative standardisation of *terra sigillata* forms across this world when Roman ways of life were being established, means the resulting assemblages can be analysed to map how people in diverse regions of the early Roman Empire ate and drank together. That is, did they all use the same vessels for the same foodstuffs across this world? Despite this wealth of artefactual evidence and its huge potential for food-consumption analyses, however, it is chronically under-utilised in research concerning socio-cultural practices. With limited exceptions (e.g. Cool 2006; Bermejo Tirado 2018), study of this ceramic fabric continues to focus on its roles in the chronological sequencing of individual excavations or in investigating trade patterns between regions.

A major barrier to using this wealth of ceramic remains to answer consumption-oriented questions is the way it is often recorded and published. Steven Willis noted (2004: Section 5.2.2) that complete datasets of *terra sigillata* are rarely fully published. The sheer quantities of *terra sigillata* excavated, and the time-consuming and costly specialist processes of classifying and collating all these truly big archaeological data, and scholarly interest their production and trade, has led to the selective and often summary recording and publication of these remains, often overlooking their

precise contexts and specific uses. That is, the *terra sigillata* assemblages recorded from many excavations often only comprise diagnostic sherds of specific vessel forms. So, we lack adequately recorded data – and often the will to think about comprehensive and detailed recording methods and analytical possibilities for the full ranges of types of tablewares found in different archaeological contexts – that can inform on the ways in which the various groups of people who constituted Roman society ate and drank together, on their socio-spatial interconnectedness, and on socio-cultural differentiation. More detailed and more comprehensive recording of these artefacts and their specific contexts can help address such questions. As articulated by Hilary Cool (2007: 54), current approaches to the archaeological evidence are frustrating a consumption-oriented approach which needs to be built into the recording and collation processes at the project design stage.

So, studies of Roman tablewares concerned with social practice are limited by data quantity and quality, focusing on variation in fabric type to distinguish, for example, indigenous and colonial populations (see e.g. van Oyen and Pitts 2017, 5-7). Despite their potential for more holistic investigations of the socio-cultural diversity of food-consumption practices, at regional, community, and household levels, analyses of tableware vessel forms and of variations within and between assemblages (e.g. in quantity, shape, capacity), and their social contexts are not adequately utilised.

The *Big Data on the Roman Table* network brought together an international network of Roman archaeologists and ceramic specialists, working across the empire, with specialists from other disciplines (computer science, mathematics and digital humanities) to share analytical methods, problems and aspirations, and to showcase different ways of classifying and analysing Roman tablewares, to start thinking more about improving recording and analyses of these big data for investigating social behaviour across the Roman world (Allison *et al.* 2018). This network brought fresh perspectives on: more flexible artefact collation processes; measuring vessel capacity, quantitative and spatial analyses of different archaeological datasets; visual representation; and automated pottery identification techniques. Ceramic specialists participating in the *Big Data on the Roman Table* network indicated a certain amount of frustration at the lack of adequate time and resources to record all these artefacts consistently and comprehensively for such socially oriented analyses (see Willis 2018: Section 5). It was widely agreed that more comprehensive recording could facilitate consumption-oriented analyses for new levels of understanding of varying social practices among the diverse communities that made up the Roman world.

For this reason, the *Arch-I-Scan Project*, involving archaeologists, mathematicians, computer scientists and partner organisations charged with the curation and public presentation of Roman ceramics, is developing processes so that *terra sigillata* remains can be recorded automatically without costly specialist processes (van Helden *et al.* 2022). Specially selected collections of 1st–2nd centuries CE *terra sigillata* – from the London Museum, Museum of London Archaeology, Vindolanda Trust, and Colchester and Ipswich Museum Services – have been used to train and test an artificial intelligence service, and to develop digital datasets to preserve information for comparative analyses. A breakthrough in this project, largely resulting from the limited opportunity that the Covid-19 pandemic allowed to record real pots, was the development of simulated pots and sherds to increase the numbers of artefacts for training the AI machine (Nunez Jareno *et al.* 2021). This AI service and the annotated datasets of real sherds can lead to more effective use of such ceramic remains in investigations of Roman socio-cultural practices.

My specific reason for setting up the *Arch-I-Scan* Project was for more efficient, consistent, comprehensive and detailed recording across datasets so they can be used for more effective and holistic inter-site investigations of socio-cultural behaviour around eating and drinking for greater understandings of social practices across the vast – socially and culturally diverse – Roman world.

## Analysing fineware assemblages for food-consumption practices

The ubiquity of *terra sigillata* and of its limited range of vessel forms across the Roman world, often taken to demonstrate the spread of Roman culture, might seem to fly in the face of using these ceramics to investigate for socio-cultural diversity. However, just because communities around the Roman world bought, or were supplied with, this pottery, can we be certain that they would be using it in the same manner throughout that world? As noted above, work has been carried out to demonstrate how handmade pottery and cooking pots can be used to identify different ethnic groups and the sex of their makers. So, if we can identify different ethnic cooking practices through cooking vessels found in different parts of the Roman world, this must surely flag up that different people in this world also had different eating and drinking practices, despite the seeming uniformity of the tablewares used for these practices. That is, people in different part of the Roman world may have used *terra sigillata* vessels but they may have used them in different ways, depending on their traditional foodways.

In Australia, Chinese noodle bowls from the many Asian emporia are much cheaper than Italian pasta bowls so,

being more emersed culturally in Italian than Chinese cooking, I generally use noodle bowls for serving my pasta dishes. My family members and guests do not seem concerned about this cross-cultural practice. Australia is a multi-cultural country. I can see a situation in the multi-cultural Roman world where local populations no doubt purchased the available, and attractive, *terra sigillata* tablewares but did not necessarily change their culinary and dining practices to match those of Italian, or southern Gaulish, tastes. Indeed, this may be what happened in Spain when an imitation African cooking plate seems to have been used to cut and probably serve food, possibly bread (Bermejo Tirado 2018: Section 3, figure 2). Even in the not-so-totally Roman town of Pompeii, in Greek-dominated southern Italy, Pompeian Redware may have performed several tasks, for which it may, or may not, have been originally designed (Allison 2009a: 21-23).

The *Arch-I-Scan* Project has been building up usable datasets and testing the AI system (Allison *et al.*, forthcoming). Over the last couple of decades, though, I have been using available, less-than-perfect data to investigate ways of carrying out quantitative and spatial analyses of ceramic vessels for what their intra-site distributions might tell us about difference foodways within sites, particularly military sites. The artefacts related to gendered dress and other activities for which I carried out quantitative and spatial analyses in my *Engendering Roman Military Spaces* Project (Allison 2012: 2013) tended to be more comprehensively catalogued and published than pottery, largely because such items were less ubiquitous and often less uniform in type. While the current practice of sampling ceramic remains is problematic for socio-spatial investigations, it does not render the use of such records for such investigations totally hopeless.

For the Limes Congress in Pecs, 2003, I plotted the fineware remains across the fortress of Vetera I, according to the different fabrics (Allison 2005, fig. 6). There was an evident distribution distinction, particularly between South Gaulish and Italian *terra sigillata,* possibly explained by this site's chronology, with the Italian *terra sigillata* being from the earlier Augustan and pre-Claudian forts (see Allison 2005 fig. 1), and the South Gaulish *sigillata* from the last Claudian-Neronian fortress. For the Limes Congress in Ruse, 2012, Martin Sterry and I carried out further quantitative and spatial analyses of the ceramic remains from Vetera I and from the fort at Ellingen, to assess the differences in ceramic assemblages among the different buildings in these military bases (Allison and Sterry 2015). While the published ceramic record from both Vetera and Ellingen can be considered a sample only, the distribution for the likely tablewares at the latter, in particular, showed a difference in the distribution of the fineware fabrics (Allison and Sterry 2015: fig. 4), with the greatest concentration of imported *terra sigillata* and Gallo-Belgic ceramics in the southwest quarter of the fort where there is thought to have been the commander's residence, at least during Phase II of this fort (Zanier 1992: 84-86), and a building belonging to the earlier fort, that may have been a small bathhouse or a previous commander's residence (Allison 2013: 277). The soldiers' barracks would seem to have had more local and utilitarian tablewares.

These studies involved different fabric types but to investigate different eating and drinking practices vessel forms are likely to be more informative. After plotting what forms were being used in the different parts of the fort at Ellingen, using very broad functional categories, it was difficult to interpret the pattern (Allison and Sterry 2015: fig. 5). Analysis of the distribution of *terra sigillata* forms from the civilian context of the Insula of the Menander in Pompeii, according to current perception of their 'use labels', was seemingly more successful (Allison 2020, fig. 6). Again, the material recorded from this insula can only be considered a sample, but it showed some potentially interesting patterns. The so-called cups and chalices were prominent in the larger houses, presumably the more elite houses, while plates were often the only vessels recorded in smaller establishments at the lower end of the social scale. These very partial data potentially show social distinctions in food-consumption practices in Pompeii. However, we are probably less well informed about what these different vessel types and forms were used for than we like to think. Cool suggested (2006: 276) that, at military sites in Britain, the larger bowls (e.g. Dragendorff 29 and Dragendorff 37) would have been communal drinking vessels used by ordinary soldiers while the smaller cups were individual drinking vessels used by senior officers. At Bearsden, large *terra sigillata* bowls (Dragendorff 37) were most prominent in the bath-house leading to the suggestion that wine or beer was 'quaffed' in this context (Breeze *et al.* 2016: 359). However, Geoffrey Dannell has argued (2006: 160) that what are often called 'cups' (e.g. Dragendorff 33: see Cool 2006: fig. 16.1 no. 3) were more likely to have been sauce bowls. The predominance of these sauce bowls in the bigger houses in the Insula of the Menander in Pompeii might imply that those living in these houses had greater access to such sauces than people living in smaller houses. The greater range of vessel types in these larger houses could also suggest a more extensive range of dishes being served to these elite citizens. The predominance of plates in less elite dwellings, including those considered commercial food outlets (i.e. House I 10-2-3 – see Allison 2006a: 297), could potentially be related to a higher proportion of these peoples' diets being bread, perhaps collected from the bakery and served on these plates, with no dipping

sauces. Can we be certain that these vessels were used in the same manner throughout the empire, however?

Interpretations of precise functions aside, if I can find ceramic distribution patterns within these sites according to vessel fabrics and forms which are likely to document different social or possibly ethnic foodways, given more comprehensive data it is potentially possible to investigate both inter and intra-site foodways variations, despite the occurrence of *terra sigillata* across the Roman world. However, we are still a long way from being clear about, and agree on, the actual uses of the various forms (see Christmas and Pitts 2018: Summary). If we can focus on the assemblages of forms and their proportional representation at each site, irrespective of perceptions of their uses, we may be able to start seeing patterns (see van Helden and Allison forthcoming). Willis (2004, Sections 7.3 and 7.5) and Sterry (2018: Section 3.2), among others, have noted a predominance of large, decorated *terra sigillata* bowls along Hadrian's Wall. Willis argued that this is related to supply (2004, Section 7.3.4) and Cool (2006: 276) to communal drinking. However, as has long been recognised (i.e. Karl Marx as cited in Miller 2001: 32), production and supply are in all respects dependent on consumer demand. And, as shown by William Baddiley (2018), sufficient comparative analyses of capacity of different types of Roman drinking vessels have not actually been carried out to differentiate between individual and communal drinking vessels.

## Pottery and gendered practices

I started this paper by suggesting that we might reach greater understandings of social, and possibly gendered, practices surrounding pottery use. While it is very difficult to identify gendered use of tablewares in the Roman world through the artefactual evidence, we can at least think a bit more about who is doing the food preparation in different contexts. At military sites it has been considered that soldiers cooked together in their *contubernia* (see Carroll 2005). However, when we introduce women and families into their barracks (see van Driel Murray 1995, 1998), and pottery seemingly made by women, these ideas need to be rethought. I don't have a solution here but if we consider traditional women's roles (see Allison 2024) it would seem possible that some ordinary soldiers, at least, were having their meals prepared by women in their barracks. Indeed, using the evidence at Vindonissa as an analogy, some interesting observations can be made from the artefact distribution inside the supply fort at Oberstimm and the legionary fortress of Vetera I concerning food preparation by women inside Roman forts (Allison 2013: 145, 217-218, 332). From Hans von Schönberger's identification of Buildings 12 and 14 as a '*tabernae*' inside the Oberstimm fort (1978: 119-120), and the distribution of female artefacts and tablewares inside this fort and in Building a of Vetera I, it would seem reasonable to suggest that women indeed prepared and served food and drink in these military contexts, as they also did in civilian contexts (see relief from Ostia: Kampen 1981: 44-51, fig. 18; and Asellina's *taberna* in Pompeii: e.g. Fantham *et al.* 1995: 337). When it comes to gendering food-consumption practices through analyses of tablewares and their spatial distribution this is as yet in the 'too hard basket' but worth thinking about.

## Conclusions

This is largely a revisionary paper about socio-cultural practices around eating and drinking in the Roman world, and particularly in military contexts. It is evident that such investigation has received rather piecemeal attention, frequently reliant on unverified assumptions about parallels between modern Western, mainly Anglo, eating and drinking practices and some kind of behavioural uniformity across the Roman world. Such premises lead to rather simplistic approaches to an important aspect of social-cultural behaviour that was undoubtedly very different from our own and would have varied considerably among the different parts of the Roman world, with different socio-cultural groups of people engaging with Roman culture to differing degrees. While I do not provide any definitive answers to the thoughts and questions put forward here, I hope I have provided room for some contemplation on foodways around the Roman world, and for further contemplation on the potential diversity of socio-cultural behaviour across this world, including seeing Roman military sites as active, lived, and diverse communities.

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# Frontiers and Dehumanisation: Mobility, Materiality and Religious Activity in Frontier Zones

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## Introduction

Walls, borders and frontiers are a topic of major global interest as seen in the USA, Europe and elsewhere (Marshall 2018; Nail 2016; Scott 2020), and they are never far from the news. One major dimension of these borders is often the dehumanisation of those being kept out by the boundary or those crossing it. This can be seen in the physical treatment of the border-crossers as they encounter and move across the boundaries and the rhetoric used in promoting border security. This dehumanisation and othering is also linked to ideas connected with posthumanism and power which can be a useful way of thinking about the implications of the frontiers and borders in the past. This article will be a discussion of some of these issues in Roman frontier studies by looking at experiences within the frontier zone. Its focus will be Hadrian's Wall but the discussion will also be relevant to other frontiers in the Empire and other contexts in Roman archaeology.

The article will offer three border stories connected with the frontier zones and the relationship of posthumanism with dehumanisation, othering and power: mobility and movement of people, the treatment of materials, and the use of religious activity within the landscape. It will consider the significance of mobility and movement as an integral component of frontiers. The way in which frontiers control movement and treat people can form part of this dehumanisation. Another aspect of these frontiers is their materiality and the importance of materials as part of the human experience of these boundaries and the values attached to them. The article will explore examples of how the treatment of materials can be just as significant as the treatment of people. Finally, the article will think about the wider landscape of frontiers and the use of religious activity within these landscapes. The meaning and treatment of these landscapes, which can be seen through this religious activity, is an important part of understanding the impact of the frontiers. These three stories emphasise the relationship between people, mobilities and actions, materials, experiences and landscape. They can also converge in the frontier system in terms of power, control and subjugation, which we can consider through the idea of dehumanisation. Thinking about the frontier in these terms also encourages us to consider the impact of frontier areas from the perspectives of different people but also materials and landscapes.

## Theory and Roman Frontier Studies

The history of the study of the Roman frontiers in Britain, and beyond, demonstrates the strong focus on their construction history, structural components and design. This can be seen, for example, in the range of books and other publications that have been produced on both Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall. One of the most important is the *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, first published by John Collingwood Bruce in 1863 as *The Wallet-Book of the Roman Wall: A Guide to Pilgrims Journeying Along the Barrier of the Lower Isthmus* and then retitled the *Handbook* for the second and third editions in 1884 and 1885. The book has since gone through numerous editions, being updated by eminent scholars in the field, with the latest being David Breeze for the fourteenth edition in 2006. Bruce also published another significant book in 1851 entitled *The Roman Wall* which also went through a number of editions. It could be argued that the *Handbook*, and other works, have played a significant role in shaping the agenda for the way in which these frontiers are studied, imagined and experienced, including how Hadrian's Wall should be encountered and traversed. This influence can be seen in other publications, such as the guide to the Antonine Wall by Anne Robertson (1960), later edited by Lawrence Keppie (Robertson 2015), and approaches to other frontiers across the Roman Empire. The book series the 'Frontiers of the Roman Empire' by the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site initiative can also be seen to draw on these traditions. These works are indispensable resources but it could be argued that they can also play a role in consolidating the established approach to the way in which we think about these frontiers and the wider frontier landscapes.

Early interest in the remains of Roman military archaeology and frontiers, and the activities and organisation of the Roman army, also developed within the context of rising imperialism and nationalism in Europe, influencing interpretative frameworks and perspectives. In Britain, the period of the greatest extent of the British Empire coincided with developing interests in the Roman era archaeology of Britain, including the Hadrian's Wall zone (cf. Hingley 2000;

2008; 2012). The recognition of this context has also encouraged the development of post-colonial perspectives within Roman studies which have sought to bring out the different experiences of people within the Empire, as in the use of ideas of discrepant identity (e.g. Mattingly 2006). Studies of the Roman army and frontiers, however, have also tended to be fairly normative in their approaches and the questions that have been investigated; often with the influence of perspectives from modern armies and warfare about how we interpret that past. It could be argued that archaeological theory has not often shaped studies of Hadrian's Wall, other frontiers or Roman military archaeology more generally (cf. Gardner 2022), but it could be useful for helping us to get more out of the hugely rich resource of material we have connected with frontiers and people's lives at frontiers.

Post-colonial influences in Roman archaeology developed alongside post-processual archaeology emphasising the need for more social perspectives in archaeological interpretation. More recent discussions have sought to break down the dualisms that we have seen in archaeological theory (e.g. Olsen *et al.* 2012; Webmoor and Witmore 2008). Posthumanism is one of the concepts which brings together aspects of culture and nature and can be useful for helping us to think about the full implications of frontiers. Posthuman perspectives in archaeology emphasise the way in which there can be unbalanced relationships between different people and also materials, animals, plants, landscapes, experiences and emotions (cf. DeLanda 2002: 51; 2016). This article will examine the implications by discussing how frontiers in the Roman period can be studied in terms of dehumanisation through thinking about mobility, materials and landscapes.

## Mobility and movement: dehumanisation and frontiers

We can think about the way in which the frontiers were about the movement of people, including the experience and control of mobilities. These movements formed an integral component of these frontiers and their structure. Mobilities can also be considered as acts of becoming and will have had an impact on people's identities within the frontier zone. Geographers have written about mobilities (e.g. Adey 2010; Cresswell 2010; Merriman 2012), including molar and molecular mobilities (e.g. Merriman 2019) drawing on the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their work such as *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988). Peter Merriman (2019) has used 'molar' and 'molecular' movements to look at 'the processes through which movements emerge and are rendered perceptible and imperceptible, with perceptions of movement and stasis emerging amidst the unfolding of the world and the becoming of events' (Merriman 2019: 66). Merriman regards molar mobilities as those that are organised, easily represented and expressed, and as clearly demarcated and bounded assemblages or aggregates that are frequently aligned with state and non-state actors. Molecular movements are vital, incessant, and unruly, operating below the threshold of perception and associated with different becomings. These becomings can be seen as small actions that 'traverse, cross-cut and continually undermine molar imaginations' (Merriman 2019: 67).

Hadrian's Wall is a useful context with which to explore the landscape in terms of these different movements. We can consider the way in which the frontiers created both molar and molecular mobilities and the way in which these movements were integral components of the frontiers. At Hadrian's Wall there are several features which can be considered in terms of how they relate to the control of movement and other aspects of mobility, including the forts, gates, roads and ditches and banks. The construction process of Hadrian's Wall had movement as an integral consideration which is also connected with how we think the Wall functioned; the Wall was not just a boundary but also where movement of different kinds took place; but also, where mobility was prevented (cf. Symonds 2020; 2021). Analysis of the Wall has indicated that its design was altered as it was being built. David Breeze (2019: 76-77), for instance, has argued that forts were moved onto the Wall during the construction process because it allowed the army to access the areas to the north more quickly than having to file through a milecastle gate. He has suggested that this new situation may also have meant that a wall-walk was no longer needed because there was a greater military presence in the land to the north (Breeze 2019: 78-79); this might then explain the reduction in the width of the Wall as it was being constructed.

A major component of Hadrian's Wall is the Vallum, a ditch which ran for much of the length of the south side of the Wall (Breeze 2015). The way in which the Vallum controlled movement means that we can look at the molar mobilities and the individual responses through molecular mobilities. This approach also draws on post-colonial theory in thinking about the experience of those under control. The Vallum was around 6m wide at the top and 3m wide at the bottom though these dimensions did vary. Either side of the ditch was a mound of the earth taken from digging the ditch.

There has been a lot of discussion about the function of the Vallum, but it seems most likely to have been connected with controlling movement of people since it meant that the ditch could only be crossed at forts. There also appear to have been some gaps in the north mound at milecastles suggesting that moved along

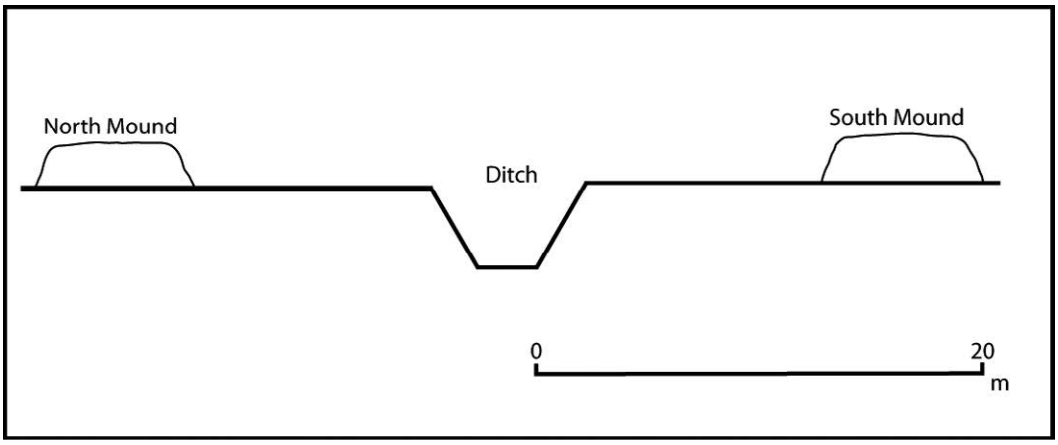


Figure 1. Outline diagram of the Vallum to the south of Hadrian's Wall (drawn by Adam Rogers adapted from Breeze 2006: 85).

the north berm from forts to milecastles (Breeze 2019: 81). The Vallum's position to the south of the Wall also suggests that both the areas to the south and the north could be hostile. It will have been involved in people's relationship with moving in the landscape. Hostile forces may have been prevented from getting too close but other civilians would have needed to cross the Vallum to conduct any activities on the frontier or beyond it. Individual responses to the Vallum can be seen in terms of the molecular mobilities that the frontier system of power and control created. Thinking in terms of these mobilities offers further density to our understanding of the materiality and impact of the frontier.

It may also be possible to develop a more nuanced understanding of the frontier, including the Vallum, by looking at aspects of the way in which it would have been experienced in its landscape setting. Not only are there practical considerations connected with boundaries, but they could also have symbolic significance. We know, for instance, that in religious terms boundaries could be associated with deities (Merrifield 1987: 39). Boundaries also seem to have attracted religious activity including ritual deposition, especially at entranceways but also at other locations along them. Crossing the threshold could have been regarded as an event that was charged with symbolism (Collis 1996: 90). Boundaries can also be regarded as significant because of the way in which they structured space and separated areas of space. Boundaries were also meaningful because of the way in which they could socially include and exclude. The action of crossing a boundary would also have been a physical act of encounter and engagement with the structured landscape. Ditches could also be significant because of the way in which they could fill with water, becoming like rivers or pools which could also have religious meaning. Indeed, there is some evidence that the Vallum, at least in some locations, channelled and drained water when needed (Wilmott 2008), as seen at Benwell where the ditch was revetted in masonry and there was a drain (Hingley 2022a: 222). Engaging with Hadrian's Wall would have been a physical and tactile experience event as people encountered the terrain and the stone structures, gateways, towers, ditches, banks and roadways. We can look at the Vallum in terms of how it was experienced and the impact it had on movement. Within the context of local peoples, it is also possible to see the Vallum in terms of its physical, emotional and cultural impact, including in connection with worldviews and beliefs associated with ditches, boundaries and water. One of the immediate effects of the construction of the Vallum will have been to change and disrupt the landscape that was already imbued with meaning. It will also have created a culturally significant ditch and changed the way in which the landscape could be traversed and encountered.

Another facet of this impact on movement in these frontier landscapes is the evidence relating to the attitude of the military to the local population. We can see that attitudes towards local peoples can be linked with dehumanisation and othering, as seen in the 'distance slabs' and other stonework. Coming from the Antonine Wall, these distance slabs, or legionary tablets, record the distance or length of the Wall that had been completed by the legion involved (Robertson 2015: 34). The slabs also have elaborate sculpted reliefs and scenes, many of which depict the savage treatment of the people that the army encountered. These images draw on a longer tradition of depicting the treatment of people by the Roman army as seen on military tombstones. One common image is the stylised cavalryman using his horse to trample people depicted as barbarians such as Longinus Sdapeze (RIB 201) at Colchester and Dannicus (RIB 108) and Sextus Valerius Genialis (RIB 109) at Cirencester.

One of the more elaborate distance slabs was found around 400m northwest of Balmuildy fort (RIB 2193) which depicts scenes of a cavalryman with a shield and thrusting a spear standing over two naked captives. They have their arms behind their backs and squatting and with weapons scattered about them. Another image shows a captive sitting tied up and with an eagle and Capricorn standing above him; the Capricorn represented the Second Legion. Another example is the distance slab found at Bridgeness at the eastern end of the Antonine Wall overlooking the Forth and close to the town of Bo'ness (RIB 2139). Here one image shows a cavalryman, spear in hand, riding over four naked captives. One of these figures has been decapitated, a second is falling dead and the other two are on the ground. A distance slab from Hutcheson Hill (RIB 3507) depicts a female figure possibly being a personification of Britannia. The figure is holding out a wreath to a person with an eagle-standard. Either side are panels of bound captives kneeling on the ground and suggesting victory over the local people. All these images are powerful depictions of the way in which the army wished to be seen with their treatment of local peoples as lesser beings, others or non-human.

Another important source of evidence where we can see the relationship between the military and civilians is the Vindolanda tablets (Bowman and Thomas 1994). Though written from the military perspective, these provide an interesting insight into the activities and perspectives of the army and their relationship with local people and people based further afield. They also give an insight into the nature of military life and the agency of soldiers. The Vindolanda tablets provide important details that fill in gaps that is not so readily available from archaeological evidence alone. One of the most well-known events mentioned in the texts is the treatment of a man who appears to have followed

Figure 2. Photograph of the central sector of Hadrian's Wall and its construction route utilising the features of the landscape (Adam Rogers).

the military into Britain. In a letter he was complaining to the army stating that he should not have been beaten by them with rods because he was not a local and so should be treated differently (Tab. Vindol. 344). This is especially interesting because it provides some indication of the way in which the army treated the local people, which could be violent and dehumanising. Another well-known letter refers to the local people as a the Brittuncli (Tab. Vindol. 164) which is not only dehumanising but also suggests that the army were not concerned about understanding local identities but grouped everyone together.

The othering and dehumanising attitudes towards these people as represented by this range of evidence indicates how molar and molecular mobilities might be considered as part of Hadrian's Wall and other frontiers. The features of the Wall including the Vallum would have controlled the movement not only of the local populations but also the military and any other civilians there. By thinking about the way in which features such as the Vallum were encountered, experienced and understood in cultural terms we can look at the impact of the Wall on molar mobilities but also the molecular mobilities connected with the individual experiences at the Wall.

## Materiality and frontiers: materials at Hadrian's Wall

Frontiers were intertwined with the landscapes in which they were constructed through their design, location and use of materials. With Hadrian's Wall, the landscape formed part of the frontier in the way in which the Wall was designed and situated, and the materials that were utilised in building it. The construction of the Wall adapted to, and incorporated, the landscape and the materials that were available

Figure 3. Photograph of the incomplete ditch and stone extraction at Limestone Corner, Hadrian's Wall (Adam Rogers).

for use. We can think about the frontiers in terms of the way in which they used the landscape and altered it through the materiality of their construction. These materials that were extracted, shaped and utilised had a vibrancy (cf. Bennett 2010). The treatment of these materials had a meaning and impact on the landscape which can be considered in terms of power, control and mobility.

The treatment of materials can be illustrated with the situation at a location along Hadrian's Wall known as Limestone Corner. Along the length of the north side of the Wall was a ditch which was on average around 8.23-8.53m wide and 2.74m deep (Breeze 2006: 62-3). The excavated material formed a mound to its north. The construction of the ditch had an impact on the landscape especially through the cutting and removal of stone from the ground. This can be seen at Limestone Corner where the task of digging the ditch does not appear to have been finished but instead abandoned before completion.

The stone here, known as whinstone, has been shaped into blocks for extraction but they remain in place. Further along the ditch only a small amount of topsoil has been removed, and the rest of the ditch is unexcavated. Within the incomplete ditch there is evidence of how the stone is likely to have been extracted by drilling holes into the stone and driving wooden wedges into cracks; these wedges then expanded with water and broke up the stone further. The site reveals the interactive relationship there was with the landscape and the materials it produced and that the materials were not always defeated. A study (Collins *et al.* 2023) of the sources of stone for the Wall has also shown how the region was altered through stone extraction. These encounters with the materials, and the mobilities they created, formed part of the meaning of the Wall. The north ditch of the Wall controlled movement but other mobilities included the actions around the extraction, or failed extraction, of the stone and the movement of the materials.

One section of the western part of the Wall from Harrow's Scar Mile Castle 49 to Bowness was initially constructed of turf, filled with earth, clay and other materials, before then being rebuilt in stone (Breeze 2006: 58-62); part of the continued process of engagement with materials. The reason for the use of turf here has been the subject of much discussion including the need for an urgent construction due to security threats, that this section was the earliest part to be built or there was a lack of suitable stone in this area (Breeze 2019: 83). The favoured interpretation tends to focus on the availability of materials with turf being more readily available in the West (Breeze 2019: 83). The section was, however, rebuilt in stone within a few years although the precise dating and sequence of events are not entirely clear (Breeze 2014: 89). This would suggest that lack of good stone in the area does not seem a sufficient argument; the original towers were also built of stone. This might then mean that turf was regarded as a suitable material for the Wall and indeed the Rampart of the Antonine Wall was also constructed of turf blocks over a stone base (Robertson 2015: 17). It is possible that the turf wall was constructed as a stopgap measure because the construction of the other parts of the Wall were taking longer than expected. Despite the interpretative difficulties, obtaining such large quantities of turf, stone and other materials will have had a huge impact on the landscape around the Wall. This alteration of the land itself, and the vibrancy of materials through their extraction, reshaping and use, can be seen as a significant component of the frontier area, the impact it had and the way in which will have been experienced. The control and use of these materials can also be regarded in terms of power over the resources and the cultural and religion meanings attached to the landscape.

Water can also be seen to have a significant relationship with frontiers including Hadrian's Wall. This can, of course, be seen in the way in which the Empire often used rivers as the boundaries and barriers including the Danube, Rhine, Olt, Euphrates and Nile (Symonds 2017). This meant that there often did not need to be such major construction work at the frontiers. The construction of the Antonine Wall utilised the Forth-Clyde isthmus using higher ground along the valley formed by the River Carron which flowed eastward into the Forth and the River Kelvin which flowed to the west (Breeze 2009: 42). It was the Forth-Clyde isthmus which formed a strategic frontier in the first century AD before the army then retreating south to the Tyne-Solway isthmus which then became the location of Hadrian's Wall (Hingley 2022b: 257). The nature of the landscape at the Antonine Wall also meant that the rivers created wet and boggy land to the north (Breeze 2009: 42) which could be seen as an integral part of the frontier. Richard Hingley (2022a: 210-13; 2022b) has written about the potential symbolic significance of the way in which Hadrian's Wall and the earlier Stanegate System incorporated the River Tyne and other rivers of the Tyne-Solway isthmus and was also linked with the significance around the conquering of Ocean. The incorporation of rivers and water made strategic sense, but they also had symbolic, magical and ritual significance as also seen by the way in which the military used the rivers for the divine support of the gods and ritual deposition (Braund 1996).

**Landscape and religion in the frontier zone**

The frontier structures of Hadrian's Wall were part of a much larger military zone or landscape containing forts, roads and other settlements and sites of activity. Components of this landscape also included its religious significance as well as the mobilities, emotions and experiences that took place within it. Paul Bidwell and Nick Hodgson (2009) have studied this wider military area documenting current understanding of how each of these forts were used and occupied. Through this study they were able to demonstrate that this area was dynamic and busy with military activity. Many of the forts also seem to have performed functions connected with their specific location including being situated at important river crossings, roads or mining areas. Bidwell and Hodgson (ibid.: 44) have argued that this military zone indicates that the frontier continued to need the support of reserves because of attacks which came from both sides of it. They reason that if these troops had not been required here then they would most likely have been transferred to other parts of the Empire which were also in need of military support. This would suggest that there were people that continued to be troublesome to the army on both sides of the frontier.

The presence of these forts and military activity emphasises a landscape that was contested, and that there will have been a range of ways in which the land will have experienced, used and given meaning. We can consider the way in which the landscape had meaning for both the local populations and the military stationed there and how this meaning was integral to the landscape. One way in which we can approach the relationship between people and landscape is to look at evidence of religious activity within the landscape including altars, inscriptions and sculptures as well as the settings of this activity. We can use this rich range of sources to think about how the landscape was imbued with meaning beyond that of only human-made materiality and will have been significant as people moved through the landscape. The use and treatment of the landscape, as seen through the religion's activity, is important alongside the treatment of people and materials.

We have already seen how waterways and other watery contexts could have religious significance. The significance of the landscape can also be seen in terms of the *Genius loci* (Spirit of the Place) which are represented on altars set up by the military. At the fort of Auchendavy, for example, there is an altar dedicated to the *genius Terrae Britannicae* or genius of the Land of Britain (RIB 2175). The places in which forts were located were considered to have spirits, as seen with the possible *genius Eboraci* at York (RIB 657) and the *Genio Loci* at Chester (RIB 450). We also see altars set up to Silvanus which may suggest, in some cases at least, significance attached to areas of woodland, such as at Birdoswald (RIB 1905). The place names of the forts themselves may also reflect the significance attached to locations within the landscape. It is thought that Vindolanda, for example, may have meant something like bright or fair moor, lawn or fields with some interpretations seeing it as white fields (Birley 2015: 6; Rivet and Smith 1979: 502). This suggests that the area was identified for the characteristics of the landscape, how it was experienced and possibly how light shone on the area. An inscription to Ahvardua, a possible water goddess, by the First Cohort of Tungrians at Vindolanda may also have been linked to springs here, which also served the bathhouse, indicating that this location was recognised as a watery place with religious significance (Birley *et al.* 2016: 247; Hingley 2022a: 195-6; Tomlin 2013: 385). This watery location could well also have been important in the pre-Roman period with the Roman army subjecting it to another form of dominance and control.

In the case of Cocidius we can see in several instances that there was an association with the god Silvanus of groves, woods and wild fields. Cocidius seems to have been local to the landscape of the frontier zone, possibly with a focus around the Bewcastle area which was an outpost fort to the north of Hadrian's Wall. It has been suggested that Cocidius could mean 'the red god' from pre-Roman languages which may indicate that it was some kind of war god (Irby-Massie 1999: 108-111). At Bewcastle fort there were two silver embossed plaques dedicated to Cocidius which depict the god fully armed (RIB 986 and 987). The name of the god and the images may suggest a local god which was adopted by the soldiers, perhaps wishing to utilise or appease a god of local importance. There is potentially another more complex story, however, since the altars dedicated to Cocidius mention the names of some high-status military officers. Miranda Aldhouse-Green (2018: 220) raises the possibility that the god was simply invented by the military in the area for their own needs. The use of a local-sounding name may reflect local influences or even manipulation of local identities as a means of domination. If this was the case there may even have been a degree of mockery here. Alternatively, or additionally, there may be some recognition of the importance of how the landscape was imbued with the significance of these local gods. This can be considered in the way in which the god is found to be associated with Silvanus and how the god is seen on altars which appear to have been found not at the forts but along the Wall in more open spaces near to the milecastles. The evidence within these landscapes also indicates that there was a complex relationship between local, military and Roman religions. These gods, and places in

the landscape, could be used and manipulated in ways which could be as much about control and domination as appeasing and using the gods.

At Carrawburgh fort there are 14 inscriptions from altars and other finds dedicated to Coventina (RIB 1522-1535; Allason-Jones and McKay 1985). This is another example where the Roman army may have been recognising the importance of a local nymph associated with the springs and surrounding landscape. Alternatively, this could be the military interpretation or invention of a god to fulfil the needs of the military stationed nearby to understand the significance of this place. Another example is the god Antenociticus attested by a temple and the remains of a statue and inscriptions at the fort of Benwell (RIB 1327 and 1328). Again, this appears to be a god of local British origins, since its name is not known anywhere else (Irby-Massie 1999: 111-2). Whether the god was important to this area or was developed by the military, it is possible that the god in some way represents a new material form of some local meaning attached to the landscape. It emphasises the relationship between humans, landscapes and beliefs.

Linking religion, landscape and materials, we can also see the way in which mining and metalworking could be imbued with religious significance and the extraction of materials could be meaningful. As with the Limestone Corner site, it indicates the way in which the meaning of landscape and materials can be seen as part of the frontier system. This can be considered, for example, in the way in which smith gods are represented in the frontier zone and are associated with the activities of both the military and local peoples. This includes evidence for the god Dolichenus which appears to be of Syrian origins and to be associated with ironworking including mining, smelting and smithing (Aldhouse-Green 2018: 170-2). In Britain there is evidence of the god being associated with iron mining and iron-working areas. One focus of activity relating to this god is at Bewcastle to the north of Hadrian's Wall where a dedication-slab was found (RIB 992) for a temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus, and there was also slag from iron-working (Irby-Massie 1999: 68). Also north of Hadrian's Wall is the fort at Risingham which is near the iron-ore deposits at Redesdale. Here there is also epigraphic evidence for Jupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus (RIB 1219; RIB 1220). At Corbridge there is also material connected with Jupiter Dolichenus, including the altar RIB 1131, and also a lot of evidence of iron-working activities (Irby-Massie 1999: 67). The importance of iron-working, and other metalworking, to the military will have contributed to the value attached to this god within the military community. The association of gods with sources of ore also reflects the way in which the landscape and material resources were imbued with religious meaning. The use and domination of these resources and landscapes will also have had a significant impact on local experiences within this frontier zone. It also seems likely that there were local gods associated with metalworking and the sources of metal which will have had further implications on the impact of the military presence here. The evidence reminds us of the importance to think about the implications of the treatment of these materials and landscapes as much as the people within this frontier zone. People were dehumanised by the way in which they were treated but also through the importance attached to other components of the frontier areas.

## Conclusion

This article has sought to examine Hadrian's Wall and frontiers through concepts connected with dehumanisation to allow us to get more meaning from the rich body of material and enhance our understanding of the significance of the frontier areas. Thinking in terms of dehumanisation allows us to draw on theory connected with post-humanism, materialism and power where we can think about the way in which people, materials, mobilities and landscapes formed part of the frontiers and how they were treated. The stories examined in the article demonstrate the potential for approaching the frontiers from different perspectives and experiences. Through these stories it is hoped that we can accumulate a fuller understanding of the meaning, significance and impact of frontier systems in the Roman period. The emphasis on mobilities and negotiation of the frontier landscapes also reminds us of differences in the everyday experiences of the past in the Roman era.

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# Part 5

# Relativism and Cultures of Violence

# Which Side Does Sir Dress?

M. C. Bishop

**Abstract**

A narrative has developed over the years whereby it has been accepted that Roman soldiers, with the exception of centurions, wore their swords on the right hip in the early Principate. Then, during the 2nd century CE, a new form of left-hip suspension on a broad baldric was adopted at the same time as the *spatha* became the principal infantry sidearm. However, examination of the iconographic evidence suggests inconsistencies in this view and that left-hip suspension was portrayed well before the Antonine period. Possible reasons for this are examined, whether artistic, cultural, over-simplification of a complex reality, or a combination of any or all of these factors. It is concluded that the Roman army were perhaps less dogmatic about sword suspension than has generally been accepted in the past.

**Introduction**

During the 1st century CE, infantry sword and dagger suspension was accomplished by means of sets of four rings or loops fastened to waist belts, usually one for each sidearm (Hoss 2014: 94–106). Cavalry of this period also attached their swords to a belt (Hoss 2009; Bishop 2016a). By the second half of the century, however, the use of a baldric for the sword became more common and seems to have been the norm by the early 2nd century. By the later 2nd century and into the 3rd, suspension on the left hip had become the norm, accomplished using a broad baldric to which the sword sheath was attached by means of scabbard slides or runners (Miks 2007: 284–9).

Although most of the metopes from the Trajanic Tropaeum Traiani at Adamclisi (ROM) are now on display in the excellent site museum there, one panel (Metope XXXII, Inv. Nr.28) is now held by the İstanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri (TUR). This (Florescu 1965: Abb.210) depicts two standing Roman soldiers, facing the viewer, each equipped with a curved rectangular shield and holding a *pilum* in the right hand (both damaged, although a spherical weight is visible on one of them). They wear the *paenula* over a tunic which reaches to just above the knee (no body armour is apparent), have

Figure 1. (left) Adamclisi Metope XXXII now in Istanbul, depicting citizen soldiers standing guard and with swords on their left hips (image: G. Dall'Orto, Attribution Only Licence); (right) Scene IV on Trajan's Column also depicting citizen soldiers standing guard, but with swords on their right hips (image: M. C. Bishop, CC BY-SA 4.0).

Figure 2. Adamclisi metope in the site museum depicting a cavalryman with a baldric over his right shoulder, and hence his sword on his left hip (image: Cristian Chirita, CC BY-SA 3.0).

*caligae* on their feet, but lack the knee-length breeches seen elsewhere on the metopes (Figure 1). Their shields and *pila* mark them out as citizen soldiers, probably legionaries (since their shield blazons do not include the scorpion motif usually associated with members of the Praetorian Guard) but they differ from other legionaries depicted in action on other metopes (e.g. Florescu 1965: Abb.197–202) in one important respect – both figures are depicted wearing their sheathed swords on their left hips.

This is a curious inconsistency on what is generally regarded as a fairly accurate series of representations of the Roman army during the Dacian Wars. Right-hip suspension, attested by Polybios (*Histories* 6.23) under the Republic, has generally been regarded as the norm for both infantry and cavalry under the early Principate (e.g. Couissin 1926: 378; Webster 1985: 129), with the exceptions of centurions (Couissin 1926: 382; Webster 1985: 130), but the Adamclisi metopes include other examples of left-hip suspension: a number of cavalrymen and infantrymen wear baldrics over their right shoulders, indicating that they too wore their swords on the left-hand side. The observer is inevitably prompted to ask what is going on here?

**The conformists**

The Republican soldiers depicted in relief on the so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus in Rome (ITA) wear their swords on their right sides (Robinson 1975: 463–4; 467). They set an example that is echoed in numerous subsequent representations of Roman troops from the early Principate, both metropolitan and provincial.

The status quo is perhaps, unsurprisingly, represented best by the helical frieze on Trajan's Column. When citizen troops march to war across a bridge in Scene IV, they have swords on their right hips but lack baldrics (Cichorius 1896–1900: Taf.VII). In Scene XIII, citizen soldiers stand guard during construction of a fortification, their left hands resting on the top rim of their grounded shields and their right hands holding shafted weapons. They wear baldrics over their left shoulders supporting swords on their right hips (Cichorius 1896–1900: Taf.XIII). Overall, the Column is inconsistent in its depiction of baldrics and sword scabbards, but where they do appear, right-hip suspension is the order of the day for both citizen and peregrine troops.

The bulk of the Rhineland figural tombstones from the 1st century CE (and similar funerary reliefs from elsewhere in the empire) present the main body of evidence for infantry and cavalry (citizen and auxiliary in both cases) that ordinary soldiers wore the long blade on the right hip, centurions on the left. These undoubtedly include the most faithful contemporary representations of Roman soldiers (not least because they were invariably produced for, and near, Roman soldiery). The same is true of contemporary Danubian and British funerary reliefs.

As examples of the orthodoxy amongst the junior officers, the stone of the centurion M. Favonius Facilis from Colchester (GBR) depicts his sword on his left hip and dagger on his right (Robinson 1975: Pl.465), his sword attached to a baldric over his right shoulder, whilst his dagger is on a narrow belt worn slightly lower down his torso than his decorated waist belt. At Verona (ITA), the centurion Q. Sertorius Festus of *legio XI Claudia* holds his sword pommel in his left hand (Robinson 1975: Pl.442), whilst his brother, L. Sertorius Firmus, an *aquilifer* with the same legion (Robinson 1975: Pl.443), does likewise (but also has a dagger handle visible on his right hip). Similarly, the auxiliary standard bearer Pintaius of *cohors V Asturum* (Espérandieu 1907–66: No.6255) wears his sword on his left hip on his Bonn tombstone.

Figure 3. The incomplete tombstone from Andernach of an unknown soldier now in the Landesmuseum Bonn showing him wearing his sword on the left hip and dagger on the right (image: M. C. Bishop, CC BY-SA 4.0).

Figure 4. Pedestal relief, thought to come from the principia of the legionary fortress at Mainz, depicting a citizen soldier with a curved rectangular shield, mail body armour, a baldric over his right shoulder and sheathed sword on his left hip (image: Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0).

## The non-conformists

The cavalry amongst the Adamclisi metopes (Florescu 1965: Abb.:179–80) have already been mentioned. Although most of the action scenes include citizen soldiers with curved, rectangular shields engaged in combat, one metope (Florescu 1965: Abb.215) shows a mail-clad figure with a hexagonal shield, surrounded by Dacians wielding two-handed *falces*, and equipped with a sword scabbard on his left hip and accompanying baldric over his right shoulder. Another (Florescu 1965: Abb.211) portrays three moving, armoured figures, with mail armour, oval (or hexagonal) shields, drawn swords, and with scabbards suspended on their left hips. Metopes containing groups of musicians (Florescu 1965: Abb.191–2), in this case *cornicines*, prominently display their swords on the right hip, and the same is true of groups of standard bearers (Florescu 1965: Abb.188, 190, 207). Finally, a fragmentary relief from the series includes a depiction of two mail-clad soldiers, apparently attacking a wagon, with oval shields in their left and spears in their right hands, with baldrics over their right shoulders (Florescu 1965: Abb.219), indicative of left-hip sword suspension.

Metopes showing figures wearing tunics, cloaks, and leggings with both right- and left-hip suspension (Florescu 1965: Abb.209, 226–7) can probably be dismissed as representing Trajan and members of his entourage, and thus irrelevant to the present discussion. Although the fact that both hips are shown used for sword suspension on figures that may ostensibly be intended to be the same, people might sound a warning note over expecting consistency over all of the figures on the monument.

The Rhineland tombstones do not exclusively depict right-hip suspension, however. A fragmentary stone from Andernach (Espérandieu 1907–66: No.6209) clearly portrays an infantryman (probably an auxiliary, since he holds two spear shafts rather than *pila*) with his short blade on his right hip and the long one on his left. His tunic suggests that this relief, like most of this genre, is pre-Flavian in date. By contrast, another contemporaneous tombstone from Andernach, the more complete example commemorating Firmus of the *cohors Raetorum*, wears his sword and dagger the more conventional way (Espérandieu 1907–66: No.6207).

Just as the Adamclisi metopes are believed to be the work of army sculptors, so the series of pedestal reliefs

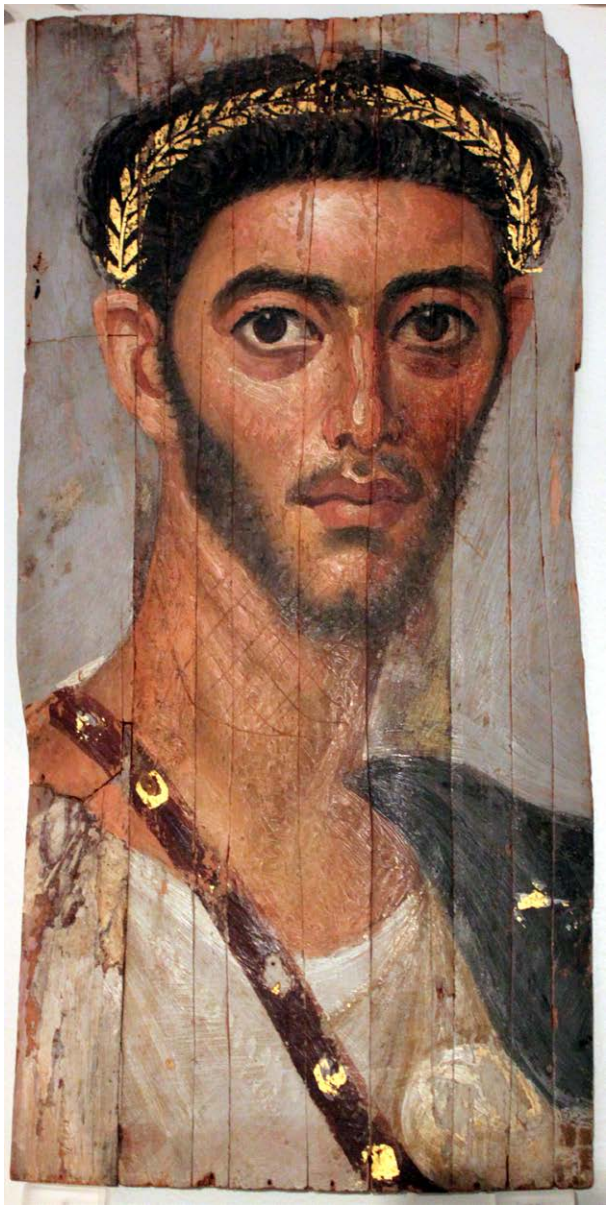

Figure 5. Mummy portrait of a bearded soldier with a studded baldric over his right shoulder and the white (bone or ivory?) pommel of a sword on his left side, from er-Rubayat (EGY) (image: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP (Glasg), CC BY-SA 4.0).

adorning column bases thought to have adorned the legionary *principia* at Mainz are of a similar level of competence and accuracy. For most of the reliefs depicting soldiers, the detail of the side upon which the sword is worn is unclear, but there is one exception. Here, a helmeted, mail-clad soldier with a curved rectangular shield, holds a loop in his right hand and very clearly has a baldric passing over his right shoulder and even has the hilt of his sword protruding from behind his shield (Espérandieu 1907–66: No.5816). Amongst the other pedestal reliefs from the same location, two depicting legionaries in combat and on the march (both Espérandieu 1907–66: No.5822) miss an opportunity to depict sword suspension on the right hip, but whether this is because the swords were concealed behind shields or because the detail was simply omitted in error is unclear.

Amongst the many striking mummy portraits from the Roman era in Egypt, there is a series depicting what are generally thought to be soldiers. Most are shown with white tunics, blue cloaks, and have narrow, studded baldrics (one even displays the hilt of the sword, suspended on his left hip). These mainly seem to depict left-hip suspension, although one passes over the right shoulder of the deceased and would indicate right-hip suspension, but with a similar baldric. These are the same style of baldric as that shown on the tombstone of the early 2nd-century CE legionary C. Castricius Victor from Aquincum (right-hip suspension; Robinson 1975: Pl.470). The bearded figures on the mummy portraits appear to be Antonine in date (although the notion that beards amongst the military are Hadrianic or later affectations has to be applied with caution, given how many citizen soldiers on Trajan's Column are bearded).

Unorthodox depictions do not end with the ordinary soldiers. The *imaginifer* Genialis from Mainz (Espérandieu 1907–66: No.5850) wears his long blade on his right hip and short on his left. Equally, Gn. Musius, *aquilifer* of *legio XIIII Gemina*, also from Mainz (Espérandieu 1907–66: No.5790), wears his sword on his right hip (at a rather strange, near-horizontal angle).

## Theories, hypotheses, and facts

What is to be made of this rather confused body of data? Can the inconsistencies in sword suspension all be put down to errors on the part of sculptors, or are they an indication that the system was more complex than has been allowed?

The literary sources are by and large unhelpful, mainly because they did not need to describe what an audience would already know. The exception to this might be non-Roman writers describing the Romans to a non-Roman audience. However, the Judaean writer Josephus' famous description of the Roman army includes an infamously ambiguous reference to the sidearms of Roman soldiers:

> The infantry are equipped with body armour and helmets, and have blades on each side, but the blade upon the left side is much longer than the other, for that on the right side is no longer than a span [0.229m]. (*Bell. Iud.* 3.5, tr. Whiston, adapted MCB)

Did he mean the left side from the point of view of the soldier or the observer? Those familiar with the accepted convention for ordinary soldiers (sword

carried on the right) might suppose he is describing it from the point of view of the observer. Or has this assumption been made in the past to accommodate that convention?

Couissin (1926: 379), considering the contrast between Josephus' text and the Rhineland tombstones, thought he saw a solution:

> Il est donc probable que, sous l'Empire, cavaliers et fantassins portaient l'épée au flanc droit. Peut-être, cependant, certains corps de cavalerie, à l'époque de Josèphe, la portaient encore à gauche comme les cavaliers de César et d'Auguste. Il faudrait alors intervertir les indications données par l'historien. En tous cas ces indications, telles quelles, sont contredites par trop de monuments pour qu'on puisse les prendre en sérieuse considération.

Conservatism may certainly be part of the answer, as indeed could errors on the part of scvulptors, but do these account for all the inconsistencies to be found?

There has long been a tendency to assume that the switch to the use of the long-bladed *spatha* for all troops went hand-in-hand with the change in the preferred side of suspension (Bishop and Coulston 2006: 154). The length of the *spatha* did not in and of itself demand left-hip suspension, since auxiliary cavalry had long been using that blade suspended from the right hip, to judge from the representational evidence. Just as with the short sword (Morgan 1987), modern reconstructions have shown how right-hip suspension offers no impediment to right-handed unsheathing of the *spatha* (Larsen pers. comm.). So could the change in the side of sword suspension be a cultural, rather than practical, choice? If it is acknowledged that the various pieces of evidence for left-hip suspension examined here are a genuine reflection of contemporary practice, then it may very well have preceded the universal adoption of the *spatha*. Perhaps the mistake has been to assume that there was a common convention across the various armies defending the empire.

Thus, there are a number of possibilities that need to be considered here. First, it was all a terrible mistake. It surely stretches credulity to breaking point to believe that every example of 1st- or early 2nd-century left-hip suspension amongst the common soldiery cited above was the result of an artistic mistake. Some may have been, but not all: who would patronise a tombstone sculptor who consistently, or even occasionally, got a fundamental detail of a soldier's appearance so badly wrong? The high level of (archaeologically attested) detail on Tiberio-Claudian Rhineland tombstones suggests an observant and picky clientele who would not stand for having fundamental details of equipment presentation mistakenly depicted. As for making such a major mistake not once but several times on an official monument like the *Tropaeum Traiani*, it is equally difficult to believe that this would have been passed as acceptable, when it was illustrating soldiers, executed by them, and presumably viewed by them. There may indeed have been some mistakes in all of these depictions, but this simply does not work as a catch-all explanation.

Second, there is the possibility of army group (*exercitus*) or provincial peculiarities. Given that army groups were allowed to some extent to develop their own identities (James 2002: 38–9), it is not inconceivable that this found some expression, whatever the cause, in a preference for left-hip sword suspension before the Great Switch of the later 2nd century CE. Indeed, that switch might have been the expression of one provincial culture coming to dominate all of the provincial armies.

Third might be unit *esprit de corps*. The cultural and ethnic identities of auxiliary units were preserved, if only in name, right through the Principate into the Dominate (amongst the *limitanei*, at least). There are even hints at ethnic groupings within units, reflecting recruiting policies as units moved around; an obvious example here is *cohors II Tungrorum equitata* (Jarrett 1994: 49–50), with both Raetian and Gallo-Belgican (*RIB* 207–8) components equally vocal in expressing their identities.

A fourth interpretation might be a hybrid of the second and third: fragmentation of army groups, caused by transferring units into and out of them, might have led to a semblance of unit individuality amongst another army group, were a left-hip suspending unit transferred into a right-hip suspending army group.

Finally, it is conceivable that the side upon which the sword was worn was a matter of personal preference on the part of the individual soldier. Such a notion might find more ready acceptance amongst some modern commentators than others and inevitably be linked to perceptions of uniformity within the Roman army (or armies) and how that accords with more recent military thinking (and experience). It now seems likely that a variety of, say, helmet types or body armour varieties might have been present in any one unit at any given time, so would it be stretching credibility to consider mixed sword suspension alongside these individualities? For some, undoubtedly so, but what matters here is not what modern sensibilities prefer, but what the Romans themselves were comfortable with. Here practicality would have played a part: if mixed types of sword suspension hindered the fighting style of the soldiers in hand-to-hand combat, then

it is unlikely to have been tolerated. If, on the other hand, it made little difference (and there are certainly arguments in favour of a looser style of Roman infantry melee than the press of earlier and later 'shield wall' forms of combat: Bishop 2016, 54), then it is unlikely to have been a deciding factor.

The one option that can safely be dismissed is that there was some form of central diktat requiring soldiers to wear swords on one hip over the other. The Roman military simply did not work in this way. Military law required a soldier to have certain items of weaponry (and not to discard them), but never specified that they should be of a certain type or worn in a certain way. Delegation from the highest level to the lowest, effectively the doctrine that is now known as mission command, cared more that an end was achieved than how it was accomplished, so there was little reason to specify that soldiers across the empire should all look the same.

## Conclusions

This paper may have seemed like a brief excursion into the untidier corners of the 'Roman military mind' (however that might be defined) and the vagaries of representational evidence, but it perhaps says as much about a modern desire to seek order where perhaps it might not have existed as it does about lassitude amongst Roman soldiers' dress preferences. There is a long history to scholars' ambivalence towards Roman military uniformity: Ludwig Lindenschmit (1882) quite deliberately entitled his 1882 treatise on Roman military equipment *Tracht und Bewaffnung des römischen Heeres während der Kaiserzeit*, 'Tracht' carrying a sense much closer to 'traditional dress' or 'costume' than 'uniform' by any reasonable interpretation.

The influence of more recent military practices and preferences, not least in the 19th and 20th centuries, exacerbated by Hollywood's fascination with Rome (Aldrete and Sumner 2023) – arguably culminating in Ridley Scott's quasi-fascistic, black-clad Praetorian Guard parade scene in his blockbuster film *Gladiator* – cannot but have influenced how scholars came to view the Roman army, whether in agreement or disagreement. It has little to do with what the Romans themselves thought, of course, and that conundrum lies at the heart of this investigation.

So, in summary, there seems little doubt that, by the end of the 2nd century CE, Roman soldiers – whether infantry or cavalry, citizen or auxiliary – wore the *spatha* on the left hip. Before then, the evidence is less certain and can clearly be interpreted as suggesting that both left and right hips could be used for sword suspension. This preference seems to have been cultural, but it would probably be rash to speculate any further than that. There are, however, hints of a more complex process than has previously been envisaged. The adoption of left-hip suspension may well have preceded the widespread acceptance of scabbard-slide suspension on a broad baldric. Indeed, scabbard slides (which are only shown used by non-Romans in a few instances on Trajan's Column, completed in 113 CE) were more commonly depicted on the Marcus Column (completed by 193 CE, although the date of its dedication is unknown).

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# Differentiation and Conflict on the Northern Frontier

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The power dynamic and political relationship between Rome and Britain in the first century CE are neatly embodied in the depiction of Claudius looming over a prone and submissive personification of Britannia on the well-known relief from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. The contrast between Claudius and Britannia, who are both identified in an inscription on a corresponding base, could not be stronger. Claudius is portrayed in heroic nudity, while Britannia appears in the guise of an Amazon with an exposed breast cowering beneath his knee. Claudius' calm, emotionless expression contrasts Britannia's look of 'pain and anguish' (Erim 1982: 280; Smith 1988). The political message of this relief is clear. Britannia has been abjectly subjugated by the might of Rome, represented by the emperor, and the province lies at the mercy of the empire and its superior strength. It is easy to read this relief as a metaphor for the politics and policies of Roman imperialism. It is, however, harder to determine how accurately that metaphor represents the realities of life in the Roman Provinces.

In his book *Rome and the Sword* (2011) and elsewhere, Simon James has examined the complicated and shifting roles of soldiers and the dynamics of military/civilian relationships. Inspired by his work, this paper examines the ways in which military and civilian populations, Romans and local populations, and conqueror and conquered were differentiated in the documentary and epigraphic records of Roman Britain. It analyses some of the well-known evidence from the province in a new light. Instead of searching for evidence of oppression, cooperation and resistance it seeks to identify the shifting criteria that characterised real and imagined social groups in specific contexts throughout the history of the province. I hope that this may serve as a launching pad for further study of ways in which individuals and populations were categorized to justify and condemn conflicts on both small and large scales, and that this analysis will in turn facilitate a better understanding of daily tensions and their expressions in the Roman provinces as a whole.

The hostility so clearly expressed in the relief of the Sebasteion and on other monuments is also reflected in the evidence for the relationship between the military and civilian populations. In the literary record, Juvenal and Apuleius paint bleak pictures of interactions between these groups. Juvenal points to the impunity with which soldiers assaulted civilians, the severity of reprisals against those who objected and the legal circumstances that favoured soldiers in court (*Sat*. 16). While Juvenal's portrayal is satirical it reflects the troubling reality of Roman occupation. Apuleius' fictional account of a confrontation between a gardener and a legionary depicts a similarly hostile relationship between soldiers and civilians. In this episode a distracted gardener's failure to respond to a soldier's inquiries leads to a fight in which the gardener bests the soldier, only to be chased down and killed by the soldier's colleagues. Throughout this narrative the soldiers are depicted as arrogant, abusive and unlawful (*Met.* 9.39-42).

These works of fiction and countless works of art from imperial structures like the Sebasteion attest to the often-antagonistic attitude of Roman authorities and their agents to provincial populations. However, they stand at some remove from the everyday lived experience of provincial populations and soldiers alike. To reconstruct the reality of military-civilian interactions in the provinces one must resort to more granular documentary and archaeological evidence. This evidence may be collected from around the empire in the form of papyri, writing tablets, inscriptions on stone, and legal text, but no coherent account of the relationship between a military garrison and local community survives from antiquity. We are therefore left to hypothesize about the general nature of these relationships from the varied evidence we have. While recent studies of the materials culture at Vindolanda have stressed intermingling of combatants and non-combatant populations on the site in the 3rd century (Birley 2016), evidence from the writing tablets and inscriptions from the site preserve evidence of distinct subpopulations. This is not to say that these groups were strictly separated, socially or physically, but that practical and notional distinctions were made between the military and non-military (combatant and non-combatant) populations at Vindolanda, although some people may have identified with more than one group to some extent.

The writing tablets from Vindolanda provide a unique window into life at a frontier fort in the late first- and early second-centuries. While few documents recovered from Roman Britain cast any light on the military/civilian relationship, several tablets from Vindolanda explicitly mention the local population and allow us to draw some conclusions about its

interactions with the garrison of the fort. The most famous of these and the one that speaks most broadly to military attitudes towards the local population is an account of the fighting qualities of the Britons (*Tab. Vindol.* 164). The nature of this text is uncertain. Bowman and Thomas favour the idea that it is a fragment of a letter from a departing commander to his successor, as recommended in *P.Abinn.* 2.6-7 (Bell *et al.* 1962: 38; Bowman and Thomas 1994: 106-107). However, it may have been an intelligence report intended to prepare the garrison for conflict with Britons or to set the expectations of military recruiters intent on incorporating Britons into the ranks of the Roman army (Bowman and Thomas 1994: 106). Whatever its purpose, this document betrays contempt for the Britons.

> ...
> nenụ...[.]n. Brittoneṣ
> nimium multi · equites
> gladis · non ụtụntur equi-
> tes · nec residunt
> Brittunculi · ụt · iaculos
> mittant
>
> *... the Britons are unprotected by armour (?). There are very many cavalry. The cavalry do not use swords nor do the wretched Britons mount in order to throw javelins.* (Text and translation follow Bowman and Thomas 1994)

The diminutive *Brittunculi*, demonstrates the lack of respect the author held for the local population. However, it is difficult to grasp the full significance of this letter without a better understanding of its original purpose. The discussion of combat techniques indicates that the letter was not intended to inform the reader about the general population, but rather about the soldiery alone, whether for recruitment or combat purposes. Whether these *Brittunculi* were enemies or erstwhile allies, the author describes them in contrast to the Roman army. We are told what they *do not* do, rather than what they do; they do not fight with swords (as the Roman army does) and they *do not* throw spears from horseback (as the Roman army does). In this way we can see a clear distinction between the military community of Vindolanda and the local population, regardless of whether they are nominally enemies or allies. This may not be surprising given the dating of this tablet, which has been attributed to Vindolanda period III (100-105 CE). At this point, fifteen to twenty years after the establishment of the fort, Vindolanda was garrisoned by the *cohors IX Batavorum*. It would be a mistake to consider these soldiers to be Romans, in the sense that they participated in a monolithic 'Roman culture' (Roymans 2014: 245-246). Rather, we should see this letter as evidence that soldiers and officers in well-established units of the Roman army looked down upon the marshal abilities of the local population of Britain.

British soldiers serving in Britain were quite rare (Dobson and Mann 1973), so bonds built between fellow soldiers were unlikely to affect the assessment expressed in this tablet. Furthermore, Batavian units seem to have preserved their ethnic character to the end of the first century or even well into the second century, longer than most auxiliaries (Eck 2016: 113-121; Roymans 2014: 243; van Rossum 2004: 121-128). Batavians also tended to return to their homeland after their military service and in some cases formed marriage bonds with women who shared their Batavian background (Greene 2015: 138-139; Nicolay 2007). This may indicate that Batavians failed to develop close bonds with the local populations among which they served. This failure would have then facilitated hostility toward the local population of Britain. In this case the differentiation that drives this hostility is between soldiers of the Roman army and soldiers of unpacified or recently pacified lands. This is significant because this pattern can be mapped onto other cases in which established military units encounter local enemies and recruits.

Similar antagonism is visible in the interactions of soldiers and civilians. On the most granular level a personal conflict between a soldier and a civilian is visible in *Tab. Vindol.* 344. In this well-known and often-discussed tablet an unnamed man from abroad (*transmarinus*) complains that he has been unjustly beaten and appeals to an unspecified authority for redress.

> i
> eo ṃagis me ca[ c.12]
> d...[.]em mercem [ c. 8]
> r[.] uel effunder [ c.3 ]ṛ[
> [..]ṃine ṗrobo tuam maies-
> [t]atem imploro ne patiaris me
> [i]nnocentem uirgis caṣ[t]igatum
> esse et domine proụ[.]. prae-
> [fe]ḉṭo non potui queri quia ua-
> [let]udini detinebatur
> queṣ[tu]s sum beneficiario
>
> ii
> [ c. 8 cen]turionibụ[s]
> [ c. 7 ] ṇụmeri eius [
> [ c. 3 tu]ạm misericord[ia]m
> impḷoro ne patiaris me
> hominem trasmarinum
> et innocentem de cuius f[ide]
> inquiras uirgis cruenṭ[at]u[m]
> esse ac si aliquid sceler[i]ṣ
> commississem *vacat*

> *... he beat (?) me all the more ... goods ... or pour them down the drain (?). As befits an honest man (?) I implore your majesty not to allow me, an innocent man, to have been beaten with rods and, my lord, inasmuch as (?) I was unable to complain to the prefect because he was detained by ill-health I have complained in vain (?) to the beneficiarius and the rest (?) of the centurions of his (?) unit. Accordingly (?) I implore your mercifulness not to allow me, a man from overseas and an innocent one, about whose good faith you may inquire, to have been bloodied by rods as if I had committed some crime.* (Text and translation follow Bowman and Thomas 1994)

It is clear from this text that the author of this tablet was not a Briton. In fact, his origin on the continent is a principal element of his appeal. He positions himself in direct opposition to the locals. This implies that he feels he deserves, or might expect, better treatment than that afforded to the local population, whom we may associate with the *Brittunculi* of *Tab. Vindol.* 164. This differentiation speaks to a general bias against the local population by soldiers and immigrant civilians alike. The violence with which the author of this petition was treated also speaks to military attitudes and actions towards civilian populations. Of course, this interpretation of the tablet's contents relies upon the assumption that the author's assailant was a soldier (Kolbeck 2018). This is not stated explicitly in the surviving text, but is strongly suggested by the author's reference to his assailant's unit (*numerus eius*), The author's failed appeals to a *praefectus*, a *beneficiarius* and centurions also support this argument, since disciplinary matters for soldiers were handled within the camps, while civil disputes were not (Hobson 1993; MacMullen 1963; Peachin 1999). The assailant's military service is further indicated by his use of a *virga* (rod or switch), which is closely associated with centurions. The author objects to his treatment because he is from the continent, perhaps even a citizen, and innocent but the beating itself seems not to be an unusual occurrence (Campbell 1984). In fact, it was the author's particular circumstances that lie at the heart of his objections, rather than the event itself.

This case lies at the intersection of military/civilian and imperial/colonial relationships and in it we may see the fluid nature of identities on the frontier. The victim in this tablet is clearly not a soldier but he is also not a local. Therefore, he is both a civilian and a colonizer. This makes his position precarious and difficult to interpret. He seems to suffer from military bias against civilians, while also holding and hoping to benefit from bias against the local population. His status is even more complicated if we consider how closely he may have been associated with the military community at Vindolanda. The discovery of this document, which is itself a draft, in a centurion's quarters inside the fort at Vindolanda suggests that the author lived in the fort's extramural settlement which was in constant, close contact with the fort's garrison (Birley 2016; Bowman and Thomas 1994). His repeated attempts to call attention to his case suggest that he spent a great deal of time in proximity to military personnel, but his exact status is obscured. Nevertheless, biases and hostility toward the British-born population at the individual level permeates this case. The *transmarinus* who wrote this petition accepts that violence may be done to the local population but believes he, as holder of higher status, ought to be protected from it (Birley 2002: 116-117). He both suffers from the bias of the soldiers and expresses bias toward the local population.

The conduct of soldiers in connection with civilian populations may also be at the heart of *Tab. Vindol.* 893, though the details of the circumstances of its composition are unclear. This tablet preserves a letter written to Julius Verecundus, the well-known commander of *cohors I Tungrorum*, from Caecilius Secundus, perhaps the patron to whom Book 7 of Martial's epigrams was dedicated, who commanded an unknown unit on the northern frontier (Bowman *et al.* 2019: 246). This letter concerns a disciplinary matter related to 'little outbursts of anger' by a soldier probably under Verecundus' command (Bowman *et al.* 2019: 246). While we know very little of what this soldier did or to whom he did it, this letter provides possible evidence of soldiers' misbehaviour and, perhaps, of their abuse of local populations.

Abuses similar to those recorded in *Tab. Vindol.* 164 and suggested by 893 are more explicitly documented in the archive of Flavius Abinnaeus from the Fayyûm (Bell *et al.* 1962). Abinnaeus served as *praefectus* of *ala V Praelectorum* from 341 to 344 and again from 346 to 351. This places the archive two and a half centuries later than the documents from Vindolanda, yet the problems of military and civilian interactions are largely the same across time and space. In the Abinnaeus archive, a man named Demetrius writes to Abinnaeus about the conduct of one of the soldiers under Abinnaeus' command (Bell *et al.* 1962: 76-77=*P.Abinn.* 29). This soldier, Athenodorus, reportedly assaulted Demetrius, who was collecting grain in Ibion, about ten miles south of Oxyrhynchus. In another letter from the archive, the head of the *boule* at Arsinoe, complains that Abinnaeus' soldiers wrongfully conscripted local men, looted a home and stole cattle in the village of Theoxenis (Bell *et al.* 1962: 62-63=*P.Abinn.* 18). This incident lacks the interpersonal violence of Demetrius' complaint but suggests broad abuse by soldiers. That these abuses were tolerated, if not endorsed, by local authorities is suggested by Demetrius' further complaint that Abinnaeus had prohibited an investigation of the incident and that

similar grievances had been lodged against him by the residents of Ctesis. Abinnaeus' refusal to investigate this matter may indicate that he believed the soldiers' actions were justified; however, it may also have been intended to protect the soldiers at the expense of justice for their alleged victims. Unfortunately, we have no evidence to indicate whether Abinnaeus succumbed to the pressure Demetrius put on him or how the *dux* reacted, if the case was referred to him. As in the cases from Vindolanda, we cannot determine how military-civilian conflicts were resolved, but we can be sure that they persisted over hundreds of years.

The local civilian population of the area around Vindolanda is also visible in references to corporate identities. These are preserved on stone inscriptions and ink tablets that have been discovered at the site and in the hinterland around it. These data may reinforce the distinctions made between civilians who were members of the pre-Roman communities in the area and those who settled nearby and were closely associated with the fort and its garrison. The pre-Roman people in the area around Vindolanda were the Textoverdi, who are named in two separate texts. The first is an altar recovered from the church yard in Beltingham, about 3.2 km south of Vindolanda (RIB 1695). This altar was dedicated to *dea Sattada* by the *curia Textoverdorum*. *Curia* must refer to some formal or semi-formal administrative body, while *Textoverdorum* is almost certainly a reference to a pre-Roman population, presumably in the Tyne Valley if not at Vindolanda itself (Birley 2002; Bowman and Thomas 1994; Rivet and Smith 1979; Stevens 1934) and may also appear on *Tab. Vindol.* 312 as part of an address. This communal entity was evidently not to be associated with the army, but its members had been influenced enough by the occupiers of its territory that they employed Roman religious formulas in its worship of Sattada, who appears to have been a local deity. For this reason, we may presume that they had close interactions with the garrison at Vindolanda. However, the 3rd century civilian population at Vindolanda, or at least a group of them, also identified themselves in a religious dedication as the *vicani Vindolandesses* on an altar to Vulcan (*RIB* 1700; cf. *RIB* 899 for the *vicani* of Old Carlisle).

These two groups can be defined in terms of their differentiation from the garrison of Vindolanda. The garrison is almost always identified by the name of the unit or units that comprised it. The only possible exceptions are groups of Gauls and Britons who will be discussed later (*RIB* 3332) and the Vardulli of *Tab. Vindol.* 181. There are at least seven units recorded at Vindolanda and in almost every case they are referred to by their official title (e.g. *cohors IV Gallorum*). This naming practice allows us to be certain that the *vicani Vindolandesses* and the members of the *curia Textoverdorum* were distinct from the military units themselves, though some soldiers may have identified with both the garrison and the *vicani*. Thus, it seems that the garrison and each of these two groups existed side-by-side but had not blended into a unified community when these inscriptions were erected. We are left, however, to ponder the distinction between the *curia Textoverdorum* and the *vicani Vindolandesses.*

It may be instructive that the two groups are associated with dedications to deities of very different types. The *curia Textoverdorum* erected an inscription to a particular local deity, while the *vicani Vindolandesses* honored Vulcan, a decidedly Roman god. Here we may see a manner of code-switching. The collective names themselves may have been selected because they were thought to be more appropriate for their specific religious contexts; a more 'Roman' name was used for a more 'Roman' god and a traditional name was used for a local deity. However, we must also consider whether these names were emic or etic. It could be that they were applied to the local populations who then used them willingly or unwillingly. Likewise, we must consider whether these two groups were, in fact, identical. Vici of auxiliary forts are likely to have attracted people from a broad spectrum of provincial society, including displaced Britons, opportunistic merchants, soldiers' families, veterans and others, and they are not easy to differentiate from each other. Nevertheless, these inscriptions suggest that there were recognized subpopulations among the residents of the area around Vindolanda and that they were differentiated from the nearby military population, even if they overlapped. Furthermore, the appearance of these two groups in formal epigraphy in the vicinity of Vindolanda suggests that they had received some sort of recognition, whether official or *de facto* (Birley 1979: 108; James 2001: 80).

An analogous corporate entity may be visible in *RIB* 899, which seems to refer to the *vicani* (spelled *vikani* on the stone) of Old Carlisle who had taken up a collection to erect an altar to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and Vulcan. While the *vicani* here are not juxtaposed explicitly with the soldiers of the *ala Augusta* which garrisoned the site, and some soldiers or veterans may even have included themselves among the *vicani,* the implication is clear. The dedicators of this inscription were not synonymous with the army. Furthermore, the *vicani* may have been described with the ancient name of Old Carlisle (Mag...), creating a formulation similar to that of the *vicani Vindolandesses*. The dedication from Old Carlisle is also similar to the *vicani Vindolandesses* inscription in that it honors canonical Roman deities. In fact, we may consider it even more formal in the sense that it was also erected for the health of the emperor Gordian. In this case the local population sponsored

a traditionally Roman religious display without the explicit involvement of the military, though we might imagine that the military influenced their decision to do so.

Still, we ought not to associate *vicani* exclusively with a local, civilian population. Examination of extramural spaces at Vindolanda has demonstrated the complex interaction of imperial and vernacular material culture (Greene and Birley 2024). Vici owed their existence to the forts they abutted and there was constant interaction between the two. *RIB* 770, from Kirkby Thore, is instructive in this regard. It is a dedication to the imperial household by Marcus Ulpius Ianuarius, who served as aedile of the *vicus.* Januarius' *tria nomina* indicate that his family received citizenship during the reign of Trajan, at least twenty years before this inscription was made. Thus, again we cannot equate the population of *vici* with Britons exclusively. Januarius' family may have been elevated from the local population, from the army or through some other means. It is significant in all of this, however, that we do not see military garrisons and local 'civilian' populations appearing together in the epigraphic record. There is, however, one possible exception to this.

A differentiation between military and civilian may be visible in *RIB* 3332*,* from Vindolanda, which records groups identified as the *cives Galli* and the Britanni:

> cives Galli
> de(ae) Galliae
> conco[r]des-
> que Britaṇṇi
>
> *The citizens of Gaul to the goddess Gallia, and the (citizens) of Britain in harmony, (dedicated this).*
> (Text and translation follow *RIB* 3332)

The ambiguity of the noun-adjective agreement in this inscription makes it impossible to interpret with perfect confidence, but the overall meaning is clear: the Galli and the Britons came together to erect a statue of the goddess Gallia, which was almost certainly attached to the top of this stone by the iron fitting on its upper surface. The differentiation between the Gauls and the Britons based on geographic origin is clear, but questions remain about these groups. Birley has argued that the *cives Galli* were 'surely' members of the *cohors IV Gallorum equitata*, that was stationed at Vindolanda from the early third century CE to the abandonment of the fort in the early fifth century (Birley 2008: 72; Spaul 2000). He suggests also that the Britanni mentioned here served in the same unit, although 'theoretically, it might be supposed that the 'Gallic citizens', and indeed the Britanni, were civilians'. But the dedication by the *vicani Vindolandesses* (*RIB* 1700) suggests that civilians might have also called themselves '*vicani*', though, as we have seen, *vicani* is not the only term that the local inhabitants used to refer to themselves. Some inhabitants of the area around Vindolanda were also known as Textoverdi. Though their chronological relationship is unclear, the Britanni, Textoverdi and *vicani* may have been separate, if overlapping, groups, Indeed, taken literally these terms form three unique distinctions. Britanni is a broad geographic descriptor, incorporating the entire island and all its people, as implied in *Tab. Vindol.* 164. The Textoverdi, on the other hand, are a local group, and the *vicani* were associated with the settlement outside the fort and, perhaps, formally defined by law or custom. In fact, the Britanni of *RIB* 3332 may not have been soldiers in the Roman army at all and may even have included some or all of the other two groups. This is supported by analogy with the *Brittunculi* of *Tab. Vindol.* 164, the separation of *cives Galli* from *Britanni* by *corcordesque* and the fact that the text of the final line (*-que Britanni*) is approximately half the size of the first three lines.

If the Britanni were civilians, and the Galli were soldiers stationed at Vindolanda, regardless of their actual origins, which, after over a century in Britain were likely not entirely, if at all, Gallic, we may take this inscription as evidence of friction between the military and civilian populations. But, in order to understand this inscription completely, we must also account for the significance of *concordes*. In his discussion of this inscription Birley (2008: 185) points out that 'invocation of *concordia* often implies fear of discord, or the wish to dispel it,' and suggests that this inscription is part of an attempt to quash a conflict between to the two groups stationed at Vindolanda (cf. *RIB* 1125, a similar dedication by two legions). He also highlights a pattern of Gallic deprecation of Britons in the literary tradition of the fourth century (2008: 186). But, could it be possible that the Britanni mentioned here were enemy combatants? After all, British soldiers are rarely documented in Britain (Dobson and Mann 1973). This use of *Britanni* is comparable with the use of *Britoni* and both may have hostile implications. That is to say that *Britanni*, *Britonnes* and *Britoni* are distinguished from the more peaceful or pacified *vicani* and tribes such as the *Textoverdi*. Regardless of whether the Britanni of *RIB* 3332 were soldiers or civilians, this inscription is indicative of antagonism between the occupying soldiers from abroad, the so-called *Galli*, and the local population of the province they garrisoned. The only question that remains unanswered is if that hostility was reserved for civilians or if it extended to fellow soldiers of the Roman army as well.

Of course, military conflict with the local communities of Britain was not unheard of. There is epigraphic evidence of combat to supplement literary evidence

recording the wars of conquest in the first century, various rebellions, and attempts of expansion under Antoninus Pius and Septimius Severus. This epigraphic evidence provides few of the details we might like in order to reconstruct the history of the province, but it provides some information about differentiation. For example, *RIB* 1142 commemorates the defeat of a band of *Corionotatae* by legionaries, presumably somewhere near Corbridge. This encounter may have been part of a larger campaign, but it may also be evidence of ongoing smaller conflicts between the Roman army and the pre-Roman population of Britain. This is also the case with Titus Annius, whose tombstone, discovered at Vindolanda, records that he died '*in bello*' (*RIB* 3364). Annius' association with *cohors I Tungrorum* places him at Vindolanda in either period I (c. 85-90 CE), early period II (c. 90-95 CE) or period IV (c. 105-120), thus the battle may have occurred during unrest early in the reign of Hadrian (cf. *RIB* 1051), but nothing more is known of the battle in which he died.

## Conclusion

The archaeology of conflict is particularly vexing, especially in the absence of literary evidence. Nevertheless, the documentary record of Roman Britain can give us some insight into daily, small-scale and personal frictions between any number of groups. The small sample of inscriptions and writing tablets discussed here records some of the biases, and differentiations that caused and defined these antagonisms. We can also see the ways in which individuals could both suffer from and exercise bias (*Tab. Vindol.* 344). Finally, we may note that conflicts appear on every level from the individual to the national. They also appear between the Roman army as agents of empire and conquered people, and within the Roman army itself. The categories that define these conflicts are nuanced and circumstantial. They may depend upon geography, culture association, authority, legal status or some other criterium, but they are real and affected the lives of every inhabitant of the Roman empire and its neighbours.

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# The Enemy You Know: Evidence for Complex Relationships and Interpersonal Conflict on the Northern Frontier of Roman Britain

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## Introduction

Daily life on the frontier of the Roman empire in Britain was undoubtedly complex and could be very dangerous, for both locals and for the occupying Roman forces. At its most extreme, the region was subjected to multiple large scale military operations and the large influx of new people and materials that this brought with it. Leaving the legacy of physical changes to the landscape which are still very visible today (Birley 1999: 170-187, Breeze & Dobson 2000, Mattingly 2006: 87-127). It is tempting to see here a simple binary, a struggle between the Roman imperial policies and objectives (Mattingly 2006) and the pre-existing local population who sometimes managed to briefly bloody the noses of the occupiers, but ultimately failed to remove the chains of Roman rule (de la Bédoyére 2007). However, just as we have come to better appreciate the breath of diversity within military communities themselves (Haynes 1999: 7-14, James, S. 1999, James 2014: 94-107) we must also accept that the characterization of what was local (Greene & Birley 2024: 109) and the complex relationships that developed in the occupied border landscapes meant that the definition or emphasis between friend and foe was not always clear.

This paper considers a variety of archaeological evidence from the frontier of Roman Britain in which tensions and the prospect or conditions for violence from within communities is increasingly evidenced. Arguments, complaints, and the implication of violence and punishment are present in the ancient texts of the Vindolanda writing tablets. We will also consider the evidence from the otherwise unique Vindolanda Severan fortlet and roundhouse complex, a base and settlement where the divisions between Britain and Roman are both stark and at the same time deeply blurred and interwoven. A settlement born from conflict and collaboration where the evidence for violence and separation remains as palpable today as it did over 1800 years ago.

## A military community accustomed to violence

Members of military communities on the northern borders of Roman Britain represented and left behind many examples of expressions of kinship, positive emotions, allegiances to places, units, people (including emperors), faiths, governors and officers, and the wider army itself. These bonds undoubtedly provided strong motivations for continued cohesion and common purpose and order, building a sense of community which could at times have an almost familial feel in its nature, a 'band of brothers' or 'sisters' (Birley 2002).

However, Roman military communities were also deeply complex structures. Identities influenced by a web of changing or interchangeable individuals and groups (James 1999. Bowman, *et al*. 2019: 241, Mattingly 2006: 167, Haynes 2013). The realities of life under the daily stresses and strains of living at the end of an extended supply train, combined with the lack of determination of free will, cramped living quarters, and a culture of drinking (Sands and Horn 2017) gaming and gambling (Birley 2016) coupled with the highly trained ability to carry out extreme violence (James 2011), even in sport (Birley 2022), it is not difficult to contemplate that some of the most difficult moments military communities were encountered from within (Birley and Buck forthcoming).

Violence can be described as any behaviour involving physical force and/or psychological manipulation intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone, but there can be numerous variations in the way it is employed. Physical violence will typically result in bodily trauma, but it can also be linked to additional psychological and emotional harm. 'Sexual violence, for example, may include physical trauma to the body as well as the emotional trauma of the event and ongoing psychological impacts' (Mookherjee 2015). An act of violence does not just affect the victim, it can also have long-term effects on their families and wider society, and indeed, also on the personality and mental health of the person who inflicts the violence on another. Specific incidents of violence, such as the abduction of a relative into captivity, the killing of a soldier in battle, or the death of a grandparent caught in the crossfire, can have collective meaning to the larger population beyond just that of the individual (Harrod *et al.* 2012).

A particularly illuminating text from the site of Vindolanda, Tab Vindol. 344, offers us an insight into a form of violence which was likely to have been either regular or 'entrenched' around c 118 CE.

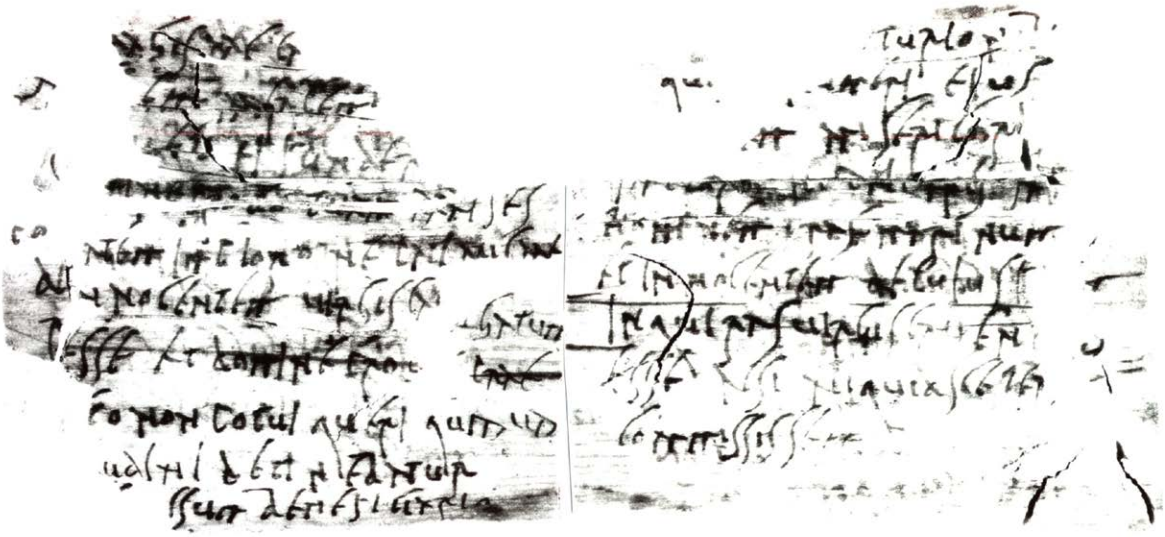

Figure 1. Tab Vindol 344. The plea for mercy. Reproduced with the permission of the Vindolanda Trust.

'he beat me .... all the more ... goods ... or pour them down the drain .... As befits an honest man... I implore your majesty not to allow me, an innocent man, to have been beaten with rods and, my lord, in as much as ... I was unable to complain to the prefect because he was detained by ill-health. I have complained in vain to the *beneficiarius* and the rest of the centurions of his unit. Accordingly ... I implore your mercifulness not to allow me, a man from overseas and an innocent one, about whose good faith you may inquire, to have been bloodied by rods as if I had committed some crime.'

It is a remarkable letter for many reasons. The first is that while the status of the individual is debatable, was he a soldier or merchant? He was clearly someone who was a part of the wider military community or landscape at large, a man who intimately knew the processes and positions involved, who and what to appeal to, whether it be the commanding officer or a senior centurion or failing that a *beneficiarius*. Indeed, the specialists who decipher the ink tablets (Bowman *et al.* 1994) are certain that this is the same man who wrote a long list in tablet 180 (Tab Vindol 180) which includes so many goods to different soldiers and professions that he must have been intimately linked to the quartermaster and his stores and well known to many of the garrison at the site.

Describing himself in tablet 344 as a 'man from overseas' he clearly identified or attempted to identify with the people administering the punishment rather than the local population, as his tormentors were also one of 'his people', also being from 'overseas'. The letter is formal and respectful while also pleading, indignant and just a little entitled at the same time, all of which is expressed in clear and good cursive Latin. The second point is that the punishment was brutal and physical, leaving both physical and doubtless emotional scars on the man being beaten. Finally, and importantly, the inference is that it would have been perfectly fine to administer this form of punishment to local people, creating a strong sense of the differences between 'us and them'.

We may never be sure of the nature of the goods that had been 'poured down the drain' but if anything were to incite a beating it could perhaps have been associated with an alcoholic beverage, beer, or wine. Mentions of wine and beer frequently appear in the Vindolanda texts, but it is the 'need' for, quantities and low prices for beer which is perhaps the most interesting. Beer appears to have been the common drink for the soldiers (Tab Vindol 186, 190, 343, 628) and a core requirement for positive morale as well as perhaps a hidden protagonist or energiser for internal conflict.

Drinking was a communal activity, not only in the sense of sharing the activity (Figure 2) amongst peers or friends but also in the actual vessels and actions involved which were designed to be shared around rather than being consumed by an individual alone. The evidence for this activity can be found in the physical archaeology of the site in the form of large beer mugs, which are often recovered as wooden mug staves from the anaerobic levels of the site (Sands and Horne 2017). Their locations are not restricted to the *schola* or officers' mess (Birley 2003: 18-40) but have been recovered from almost all imaginable contexts including, drains, barracks, commanding officers' houses (Birley 1994), workshop floors, cobbled yards, and roads. Some of those locations represented the re-

Figure 2. Vindolanda beer Mugs. Illustration by Rob Sands.

Figure 3. A photograph of the partial skull of a man who was killed in the Severan Wars and displayed on the Vindolanda ramparts. Copyright of the Vindolanda Trust.

deposition of material from the demolition of structures and spaces, but the majority came from occupational deposits and were contemporary to the use of spaces. The low cost of beer at over 22 litres per *as* (Tab Vindol 186) would have made its large-scale consumption a double-edged sword and potentially a medical and social problem. A lack of provision of this resource could potentially have had a negative impact on morale or at the other extreme, lowered the ability for some members of the community to function well. While we must accept that we do not know the strength of the beer that was consumed (no recipe from Vindolanda or Hadrian's Wall has yet to be found), and this itself could have been subject to a degree of variability depending on the preferences of the brewer and their traditions, the recipe and technique used, even a relatively weak brew consumed in excessive quantities would have an effect.

Like the strength of the alcohol, the potential impact of excessive drinking on the Roman military communities of the frontier may only ever be speculated on. However, if surveys of modern armies, including the British army, are an indication excessive consumption have lead to explosive consequences. A recent report on the instances of Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse among civilian partners of UK military personnel, which was compiled with firsthand accounts, concluded that a 'Culture of alcohol consumption in the military was perceived by most participants to be intrinsic to military culture, easily accessible within military bases and not monitored by military leadership. Participants described that if personnel did not fully engage with the drinking culture, they would be bullied and punished as a result. Almost all participants described how alcohol tended to trigger and escalate abusive behaviours, contributing to more frequent and severe physical or sexual violence.' (Alves-Costa F *et al.* 2021: 21)

**'Britunculli' or 'brother'?**

Sometimes trophies of war and conflict were taken and kept by soldiers as grim reminders of violence and two such victims of conflict were discovered at Vindolanda in 2001 and 2018. The description of these remains is deliberately scientific in its nature, for which I am grateful for the assistance and forensic expertise of Dr Trudi Buck (Birley and Buck forthcoming) but it does not lessen the graphic nature of what happened to these men. The description emphasises the brutality of the lives of those who witnessed these events and of the many others who may have gazed upon the displayed remains.

The partial human crania were excavated from the southern and northern sides of the defensive ditch surrounding the Severan-period fortlet, which dated to 208-211 CE at Vindolanda. Both crania displayed traumatic injuries, one significantly more so than the other. The more recent and partial 2018 find consisted of a frontal bone, with some adjoining cranial bones including the nasals, one of which suffered trauma that was possibly perimortem. This is an injury which occurred at or near the time of death. The rest of the cranium became detached in antiquity and has yet to be located by excavation.

The pronounced brow ridge suggests that the individual was male, though this is a sex estimation on a feature that varies among populations. Trauma is evident in two sharp-force injuries to either side of the frontal, the largest being a V-shaped cut mark, about 2.5cm

long, which travels anterior-posteriorly (from front to back) on the right side. A smaller cut mark is present on the left side of the head. Both wounds are perimortem or postmortem, as they showed no signs of healing, and neither cut through the bone. These wounds, while not necessarily being fatal in themselves, would have bled profusely and blows such as these are a quick and effective method of subduing an opponent in hand-to-hand combat, thereby allowing a fatal blow to the body (Birley and Buck forthcoming).

The second cranium from the Severan fort ditch, from its southern side, consists of the facial bones as well as parts of the frontal, parietal, and occipital bones of the vault of the skull (Loe 2003) (Figure 3.). This individual suffered much greater injury to the face and head at around the time of death with several distinctive wounds. The first injury was a sharp-force linear fracture on the right parietal, and this is likely to have been delivered by a blade being driven into the cranium and then removed, which would have caused injury to the brain as the blade pierced the bone. This fracture is punctuated by a second blow to the same region, this time a blunt-force trauma from the right side. The man was then attacked on his left side, with a large crushing blow to the left temporal and parietal region (Loe 2003: 249). This wound was expanded by a further blade wound, which cut through the cranium. The injuries to the left side of the cranium may well have been inflicted after the man had fallen to the ground and lay dying if not already dead, as the first blade wound may have been the fatal blow. A chop mark to the base of the cranium could indicate decapitation, while the identification of further injuries – including to the right palatine and lacrimal bones at the base of the skull – to the inner bones of the face occurring at around the time of death suggest that the head was subsequently mounted on a pole and taken as a 'trophy' of the fight (Birley and Buck forthcoming).

The impact of the above on the two victims of conflict shows the grim reality of a ferocious and traumatic series of events. However, a question which seems seldom asked is, did extreme acts of violence like this have longer-term impacts on the mental health and capacity of those who carried out such assaults or were they immune, returning to their bases and continuing with their lives without any negative consequences of their actions. We must question the continuing impact of having to bear witness to the remains of this deed, mounted on the ramparts of the fort, would have on the other members of the community? Would the barbarity of ancient conflict add to the burden of daily life on the frontier and see its replication in ways which were not intended, amongst its own.

The taking of trophy heads, according to Livy was an act carried out by barbarians, in his example the Boii (Livy, History of Rome, 23.24), but the evidence from Vindolanda fits into a pattern which stretches all the way back to the centre of power itself, Rome. A memorable scene on Trajan's column shows legionary soldiers building a road, with heads neatly displayed on stakes by the walls of the adjacent fortification (Goldsworthy 1998). In Britain the tombstone of the auxiliary soldier, 'Insus, son of Vodullius, a Treveran Citizen, a trooper in the Ala Augusta' depicts the deceased riding his horse holding the decapitated head of his defeated victim in his hand (*RIB* 3185; Bull 2007). This is not an unusual depiction and is somewhat replicated nearby with *RIB* 1172, the tombstone from Flavinus, trooper of the cavalry regiment Petriana, standard-bearer, from the troop of Candidus who is shown riding over a Briton who has had his head sliced from his shoulders. Now on display in Hexham abbey and thought to originate from Corbridge.

The finds of the crania from the ditch of the Severan fortlet, built at a time when there were incursions into northern Britain by Septimius Severus' armies (Birley 1999), offer clear examples of such trophy taking, which have hitherto been largely consigned to artistic impressions, usually but not exclusively, commemorated on stone. However, the grim realities of life for those who opposed the Roman occupation on the frontier have also been recovered at other locations, most notably at Newstead, Roman Trimontium. Here, several decapitated heads were discovered placed in pits, and it is extremely likely that their presence represented the long-held traditions of taking trophies not only as an act of affirmation of victory, but also to dehumanise and terrorise the local population (Curle 1911, 103). Dehumanising can have the further terrible consequence of working on all people, not just a single intended group.

Where the lines become increasingly blurred are when DNA and isotope analysis taken from bone and tooth fragments from the more complete of the two skulls from Vindolanda are considered. This casts doubt on the simple binary divide between what we may assume to be a Roman or native in Britain at that time. To put it simply, are the heads the remains of the traditional enemies of Roman rule the '*Britunculli*' (Tab Vindol 164) the 'nasty little Britts' or are they the unfortunate remains of former members of the military community itself, once a part of the 'band of brothers'. The forensic scientific analysis of the most complete skull, with four teeth remaining, offers us some intriguing possibilities.

The stable isotope analysis from this skull indicated that this individual was born and raised in Britain,

however, the DNA extracted from the same suggested a strong Italian ancestry (Birley and Buck forthcoming).

This dilemma offers several distinctive historic scenarios that could account for the mixed ancestry of the man. His father could have been a local recruit that married or partnered with a woman of Italian background, perhaps from the family of another soldier. If so, then this man could be taken to be the embodiment of what many believe makes up a large and important constituent part of military communities. Alternatively, his father could be of Italian extraction, perhaps a merchant or an official, and married or partnered with a local woman and had nothing to do with the army in or around the northern frontier of Roman Britain. It is also necessary to consider the possibility that this individual could have been a product of sexual violence, a topic that is well represented in Roman historiography, literature, and art (Reeder 2017). Indeed, it is even given prominence by Tacitus as one of the major catalysts for the Boudican revolt in Britannia (Tac. Agr. 31).

This is a speculative narrative building on one reading of the human remains (van Helden and Witcher 2020), but as Tacitus quotes the *Britanni,* 'We have country, wives and parents to fight for; the Romans only have greed and self-indulgence'. It could be that by reading not only the physical injuries, but also the narrative held within the molecules of this individual, we become able to see how violence can permeate through time and space, impacting on different generations of individuals, and having multiple meanings (Birley and Buck forthcoming).

The themes discussed in this paper remain issues that are stubbornly embedded and relevant to modern militaries and their communities as they must have been to their ancient predecessors. In 2021, a report into the victims of abuse and violence in the British army concluded that 'Some aspects of military culture and lifestyle continue to contribute to experiences of intimate partner violence and abuse in civilian partners of military personnel' and that 'Aspects of military culture, such as military training or rank dynamics, were perceived by participants to contribute to the normalisation/minimisation of violence and infiltrate intimate relationships, triggering or escalating controlling or aggressive behaviour' (Alves-Costa *et al.* 2021, 1-9).

If we return to ancient Vindolanda once more, we can perhaps see the potential effects of combat and the strain of life on the frontier on the mental health of a soldier, outlined in a letter to Iulius Verecundus, the first commanding officer and founder of the fort at Vindolanda from one of his officers (Tab. Vindol. 893; Bowman *et al.* 2019, 245):

Front:
'Caecilius Secundus to his Verecundus, greetings'

The tablets which you had written to me I have shown to the centurion Decuminius, that he might know that he ... it [...]|[... ?not] of body [...] but little outbursts of anger which merit castigation by one's seniors. Concerning which matter, it is more convenient that I discuss it with you in person. For the moment know that all the Decurions of this unit...'

Back: To Iulius Verecundus

Although limited to a few lines, the inference of the letter is that Decuminius's behaviour is that of a man who is under stress and is unable to cope and function within accepted social boundaries. His colleagues are united in their alarm and need to take appropriate action before something more unpleasant happens. It could be a form of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD, something that we have only diagnosed in fairly recent times but has undoubtedly always been present within military communities.

**The relationship of local versus Roman**

It can be challenging to directly find evidence for the presence of local populations at military sites. This is partly because the surviving archaeological record is a mere fraction of the material culture and evidence that was once available. Even so, on its own one could argue that 'a pot is simply a pot' or 'a knife is a knife'. We cannot readily and archaeologically discern whether the user was nominally 'Roman' or 'British' or even whether the vessel or knife was used as it was intended by its maker's or owner's own customs or cultural norms.

One could further assume from the Vindolanda letters, where Roman soldiers refer to the local Britons as the '*Britunculi*' (Tab Vindol 164) that there would be little appetite for local populations to feel welcomed or encouraged to join the Roman military presence at bases. Whether they felt welcomed or not, the archaeology at Vindolanda shows us that from the beginning of the occupation, c 85 CE to at its temporary abandonment in c 280 CE (Greene and Birley 2024: 103-105) there is evidence of local and British interaction or cohabitation as part of the same community.

At the time of the writing of the '*Britunculi*' letter, c 100 -105 CE, a small but significant extramural village, made from rectilinear wooden buildings was constructed at the site. Amongst those largely familiar Roman style rectilinear structures were a few contemporary roundhouse buildings (Blake 2014). The roundhouses were undoubtedly 'un-Roman' in character. However,

the interiors, floor surfaces, pits and features were filled with the sort of material culture which could at face value be described as indistinguishable from the sort of militaria one might associate with a contemporary barrack from the site. This included items such as many Roman style leather shoes, brooches, pottery, military kit, wooden combs, and stylus pens and a partial ink tablet. It is only when we look more deeply do, we see the subtle differences, such as local style 'bun' quern, rather than a more usual and imported military quern stone (Greene and Birley 2024).

Roundhouses like these, so common and dominant in the contemporary countryside, were in the early periods, rare oddities at Vindolanda. They sat amongst 'a sea of square buildings, and therefore preserved some form of non-Roman tradition and perhaps advertised that fact boldly as they stood directly next to and in sight of the walls of a Roman fort.' (Greene & Birley 2024).

This sort of occupation was not without risk as the contemporary Tab Vindol 344 reminds us. Britons could be repeatedly beaten with rods until bleeding, without the ready defence of you cannot do this to me 'because I am a man from overseas'. For locals who tried to become a part of the roman military community we must assume that they appreciated the risks this involved and understood the fate to which they tied themselves to, the Roman army itself. In c 117-120 CE the British revolted (Birley 1997: 101, Mattingly 2006:120) and the ramifications for all of those living at Vindolanda was quite clear. A centurion from the garrison, Titus Annius, was killed in the war (Birley *et al.* 1998: 54-57) and the garrison responded to this threat by ultimately evacuating the fort and extramural settlement. The site remained abandoned for 2-3 years and the locals who wished to live in roundhouses like these would have to wait another 90 years until the Severan wars in the early 3rd century before they would become the most numerous populations at the site.

**The Severan roundhouse encampment, collaboration, refuge, and shelter?**

Of all the periods of occupation at the site of Vindolanda the Severan period stands out as being the most unique of its type to have yet been found (Figure 4), not just for the northern frontier of Roman Britain, but on any Roman frontier (Birley and Blake 2007: 27-30, Birley 2013: 65-69, Wilson 2017: 330-331).

The traditional Roman fort that preceded this transformation was systematically removed and gradually replaced by up to 160 small stone and timber built circular huts. Nearly all of those were constructed in neat rows of five, back-to-back, making batches of ten, facing out onto well planned streets. Although

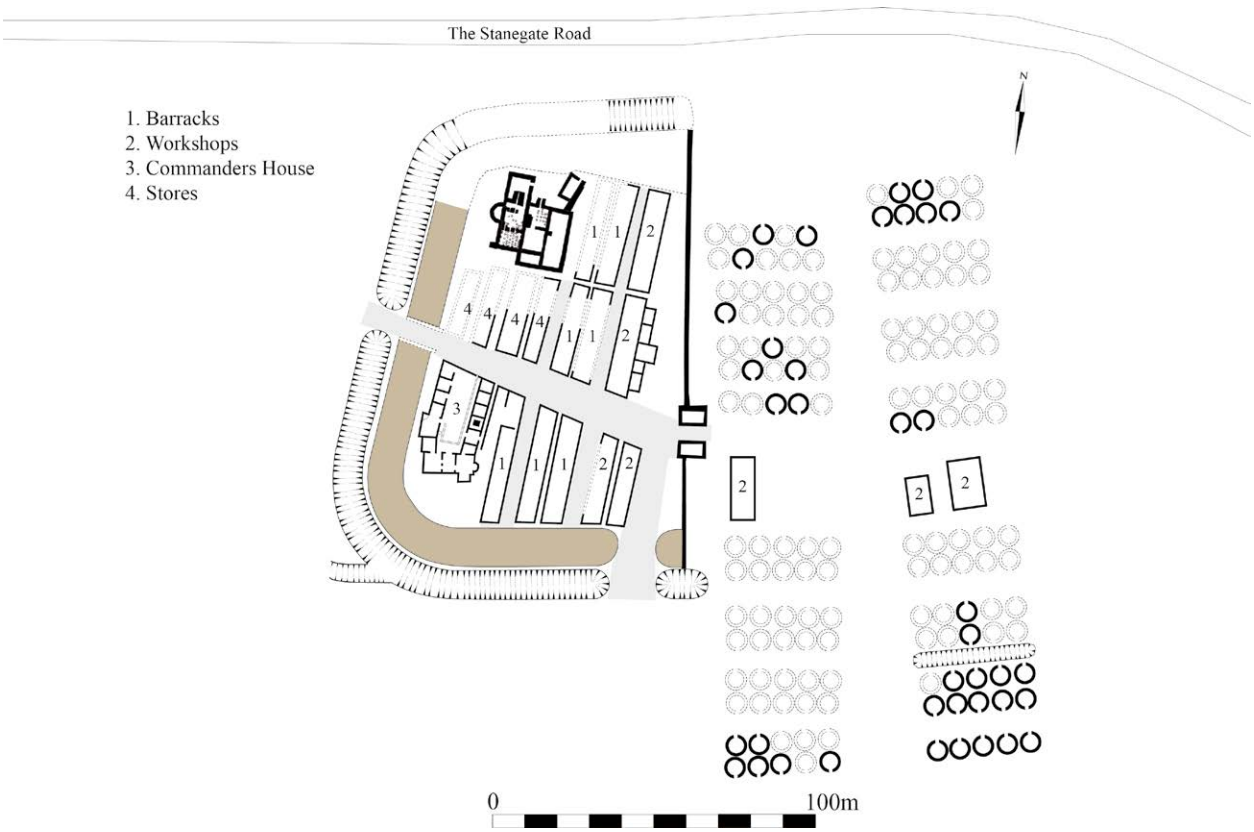


Figure 4. A plan of the fortlet and Severan roundhouse settlement at Vindolanda.


Figure 5. The 3rd century fort and settlement at Vindolanda.

each hut or roundhouse differed in some ways from its neighbours, sometimes in the use of materials, floor surfaces or internal fixtures and fittings, they were largely identical to one another. Most conform to a diameter of around 4.5m and were constructed on to three courses of stone foundations upon which timber walls and thatched roof were placed. Each building had a central doorway with a stone threshold and faced onto a road with drains. The image that they convey is confusing, a blend of native curves shoehorned into the straight jacket of Roman orderliness. It is an uncomfortable fit and one which did not last longer than the Severan war itself when both were replaced by a more conventional fort and extramural settlement (Figure 5).

The roundhouse settlement sat adjacent to a new and heavily fortified encampment or fortlet which was built on the slope to the west, which dominated the roundhouses but also offered, we can assume, some protection to the residents of that space.

A great deal of debate about the reason for these dwellings has taken place since the discovery of the first batch of five roundhouse buildings in 1929 (Birley *et al*. 1936: 240-241). What we can say for certain is that the people of the roundhouses were materially poor in comparison to their Roman neighbours. Very little pottery, glass or other artefacts remain inside those buildings or on associated spaces, a vastly different story to the relative wealth of material left behind at the fortlet nearby, or indeed to the comparable wealth of material culture located in the earlier timber equivalents of these buildings located outside the timber forts at Vindolanda some 90 years before. If the Severan roundhouse people had a great deal of wealth they took it with them, they valued things more or had less to value than the people who lived inside the nearby fortlet. It would also appear that they were not supplied with the same food as those from inside the fortlet. Only barley grains have been discovered in the roundhouse settlement, while the fortlet's supply appears to have been exclusively wheat. Food for the Britons and Romans, at least in grain, was separated from one another as starkly as the physical space at the settlement (Huntley 1998: 68-79).

The two communities living side-by-side, both identifiable through their architecture, material culture and environmental remains separated from one another physically and materially yet were deeply intertwined. The two trophy heads displayed on the ramparts of the Severan fortlet were displayed on the north and south ramparts. Neither were in direct view of the roundhouse settlement and perhaps whatever message their display was designed to convey was not therefore directed at the roundhouse part of the community. Whatever the backstories of the trophy


Figure 6. An image of the 'Cives Galliae' inscription. Taken by the author.

heads, where they were treated as enemies of Rome, and we must also consider that they may have also been the bitter enemies of the Britons living in the roundhouse settlement as well. Not every Briton would have been against Rome, and this war, like all others, pitted families, and communities against their own, most famously the imperial family and the Roman administration itself (Birley 1999: 170-188).

Collaboration in this period, even as one sided as it may have been with the Roman army as a 'partner' is celebrated at the site of Vindolanda by a single but significant inscription dedicated by the regiment (the 4th Cohort of Gauls) who had the task of clearing the site of its roundhouses and the Roman fortlet which guarded them (Figure 6).

> 'cives Galli
> de(ae) Galliae
> conco[r]des-
> que Britaṇṇị'

The dedication is made out by 'The citizens of Gaul to the goddess Gallia, and the (citizens) of Britain in harmony, (dedicated this) (*RIB* 3332).

It is perhaps the earliest surviving example of the '*entente cordiale*' or a special relationship/agreement between the British and the Gauls. It may be marking the sentiment of relief many would have felt at the end of a bitter and difficult period of Roman versus Roman and Roman versus British relations. It may even have been influenced by the collective collaboration of roundhouse dwellers and soldiers like those living at Vindolanda through those times. But it is unlikely to have reflected the views of the men who lost their heads to the spikes on the Severan ramparts at the site. It is also worthy of note that the inclusion of the '*que Britaṇṇị*' on the bottom line is small and cramped and would have been less visible than the other lines on the inscription if it was viewed from above as the base for a statue to the goddess of Gaul. A final note of interest is the context of the discovery of the stone. It was recovered in a prominent position as part of the exit of a toilet drain. Here a very different and entirely more negative message about the 'values of the special relationship' between the citizens of Gaul and Britain could be made each day (Birley and Blake 2007: 104).

**Murder within the community**

As we have discussed, interpersonal violence could and did occur between family members and acquaintances. The military communities on the northern frontier formed many such tight-knit and interdependent groups of soldiers, families, slaves, and others, creating a series of complex, interconnected networks representing those who were living on both sides of the fort walls (Birley 2016, 146-72). When those relationships went wrong the consequences could be dire and result in the taking of a life of a fellow member of the same community or group by a person or persons from which they belong.

The earliest murders that have been identified on the northern frontier of Roman Britain were located during the excavations outside the fort of Housesteads by Eric Birley (Birley *et al.* 1933: 82-96). Two partial skeletons had been buried below the floor of an extramural building (site VIII) which was likely the back room of a shop or bar, a building with an open street front rather than a closed wall. Although the skeletons were in a poor state of preservation one was identified as a partial male, with a broken sword, presumably used to kill him, still situated between his ribs. The other was more fragmented, with a partial skull placed into a

shallow pit, possibly the remains of a woman or a child. Both were deposited in the 3rd century, and may not have been directly contemporary to one another, but were buried without disturbing each other, suggesting prior knowledge of what lay buried next door. The male skeleton laid out on the floor was completely covered by a new clay surface. This was in turn cut through to dig the pit holding the partially preserved remains of the second victim (Birley and Buck forthcoming), without disturbing the remains of the man, suggesting a pattern of male then female or child clandestine burial.

In 2010, the excavators at Vindolanda, also working in a 3rd century context, discovered human remains buried below the floor of a barrack room. These were remains of a female child (Moore and Montgomery 2021), aged around 10 years old, that was placed in a shallow pit below the northwest corner of the room. She had been placed on her left side, with both arms positioned tightly together in front of her body as if they had been bound. Her body was curled tightly within the corner of the building and occupied a roughly cut grave in the floor. There were no obvious indications of trauma, so it is the context of the burial, as with the Housesteads examples, which speaks to the likelihood that this was the scene of a crime. Roman traditions and laws dictate that burials should be outside the walls of the settlement (Toynbee 1971, 48) and while examples of infant burials below the age of 2 years old are not uncommon from Britain (Carroll 2018) children of this age were given formal burials in cemeteries.

The skeletal and chemical evidence from the bones allowed the archaeologists to create a narrative around the child's life. From analysis of her tooth enamel development, we know that the child lived most of her life a long distance from the frontier only coming to Britain and Vindolanda in her final years. Who she was, living, or dying inside the barracks is more complex to decipher but we can assume that she 'belonged' to a member of the military community, perhaps as a daughter, niece, or a slave. If the child was the daughter of a soldier, then the effects of the murder, or at least of her disappearance, would surely have rippled through the close-knit community. The disappearance of a slave may not have had the same effect on the society and not been as closely investigated.

In all three cases the victims were undisturbed until archaeologists excavated and investigated their resting places. They are the ultimate cold cases, never to be satisfactorily closed, the perpetrators of the crimes and violence against them never to be caught, justice never to be served. Each is linked by the century in which their lives ended, and each is as likely to have been victims of the enemies they knew than those they did not. Whether it was arguments or beatings, moments prone to anger or excessive drinking and stress, the evidence for complex relationships and interpersonal conflict on the northern frontier of Roman Britain is compelling.

Archaeological evidence like this, and the other evidence presented in this paper reminds us of the complex and interchangeable nature of daily life and interpersonal conflict on the northern frontier of Roman Britain. A friend and ally today could be a bitter enemy tomorrow and as we have seen with both the plea for mercy and the trophy heads, being 'one of us' either by association or by blood, was not enough to guarantee success or even your life on the northern frontier of Roman Britain.

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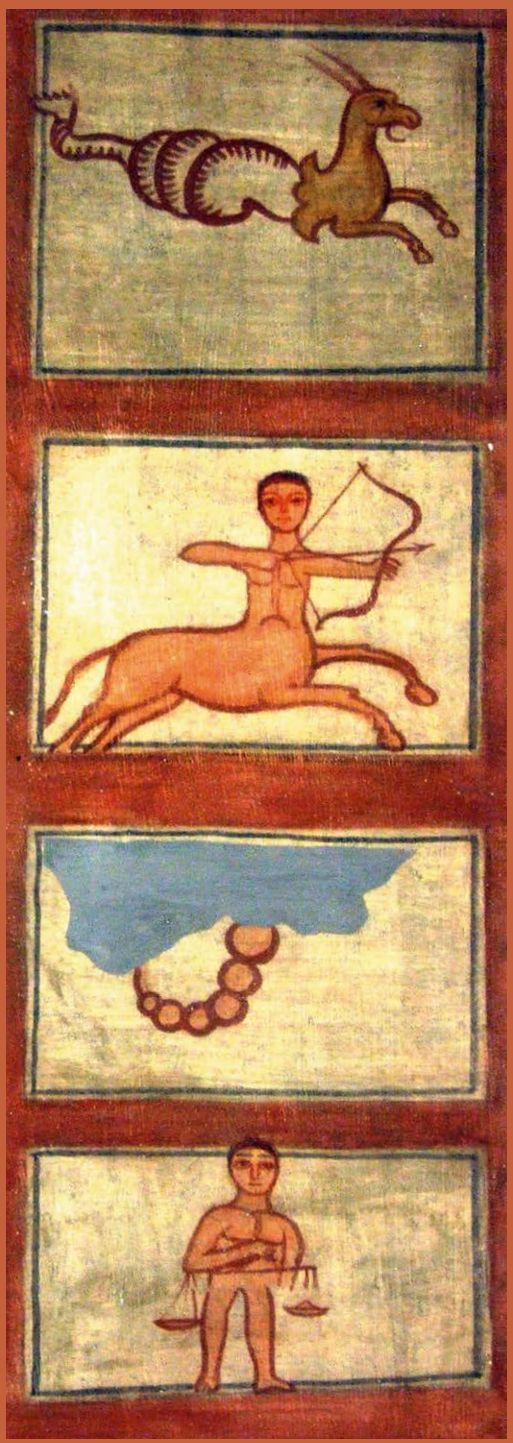

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