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Inscriptions from Alchester: Vespasian's Base of the Second Augustan Legion(?)

By EBERHARD W. SAUER

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Roman invasion and conquest of Britain has been one of the most intensely debated subjects in Romano-British studies. As far as early troop movements are concerned, there were few undisputed 'facts' except for the Twentieth Legion being initially based at Colchester and, seemingly, the Second being based south of the Thames, somewhere between Dorset, the Chichester area, and Silchester. The latter legion was, of course, initially under the command of the later emperor Vespasian.[1] The literary sources provide no topographical information about his activities in Britain other than that he took part in a battle when the invasion army crossed an unnamed river on its march to Colchester[2] and that, at an unknown point before or after, he captured the *insula Vectis* (Isle of Wight).[3] The latter piece of information, however, in conjunction with his storming of over twenty *oppida*[4] at unspecified locations (thought to include those of the Durotriges in Dorset), led to the apparent conclusion that his main, if not sole, area of responsibility was the central south coast, its hinterland, and the South-West as far as it has been brought under Roman control at that time.

In Oxfordshire before 2003 only three inscriptions on stone had been found (and two of them were small fragments).[5] It thus came as a surprise that the 2003 excavations at Alchester yielded two more stone inscriptions, one of them a minor fragment, but the other almost complete. (An inscribed bone counter had been found in 2002.) The almost complete inscription, a tombstone of a veteran of the Second Augustan Legion, not only provides the first biography of an inhabitant of this part of Roman Britain and, probably, the earliest testimony for an individual legionary veteran in the whole of the province,[6] it also challenges the above-quoted and, up to now, generally accepted version of this decisive episode of British history.

1 Tac., *Hist.* 3.44.

2 Cass. Dio 60.20.3; on the difficulties of identifying the river and the general invasion route see Sauer 2001a, 38–43 and 2002b (with further references) and note 74 below.

3 Suet., *Vesp.* 4.1.

4 ibid.

5 *RIB* 235, 240; Hassall and Tomlin 1992, 312 no. 7 = Hassall 2001.

6 cf. Mann 1983, 23, 91 tab. 10 listing only one epigraphic testimony for a veteran up to A.D. 69 (*RIB* 249 from Lincoln) set up by a veteran of the Fourteenth Legion which, after having already been deployed on the Continent from A.D. 66/67 to A.D. 69, was finally withdrawn from Britain in A.D. 70. It is unlikely that he would have retired to Lincoln before the establishment of a legionary fortress there, not thought to have occurred before A.D. 60 at the very earliest (Jones 1988, 146; Keppie 2000, 86–8), though this is a matter of ongoing discussion: see, for example, Hassall (2000b, 61) who considers a much earlier military occupation possible. Whether this ex-soldier

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This paper explores the question whether Alchester was the main base of Vespasian's Second Augustan Legion. Tree-ring dates of autumn A.D. 44 (or, possibly, the beginning of A.D. 45) for the annexe gate[7] and strong indications for a foundation of the main fortress in A.D. 43 leave little doubt that it was occupied during Vespasian's term of office, thought to have lasted until *c*. A.D. 47.[8] All known legionary veterans in Britain were buried at the main base of their own legion or a colony, which renders it exceedingly unlikely that this epitaph should form the only exception to the rule and that the Alchester fortress was anything other than Vespasian's base of the Second Augustan Legion. The future emperor's military success in Britain was one of the key factors behind his being put in charge of Roman forces combating the Jewish rebellion two decades later, his stepping stone to the throne. If Alchester was his main base, it was, like York much later, one of the very few sites in Britain which saw the prolonged (though not continuous) presence of one of the best-known figures in Roman history.

INSCRIPTION NO. 1 (FIGS 1–3)

DIṢ [♦] MANIBVS
L ♦ VAL ♦ L♦ POL ♦ GEMI
NVS ♦ FOR ♦ GERM
VET ♦ LEG [♦ I]I ♦ AVG
AN [♦] Ḷ [♦] H ♦ S ♦ E
HE ♦ C ♦
E T

(♦ = symbol for word divider of any shape)

Diṣ Manibus/ L(ucius) Val(erius) L(uci filius) Pol(lia tribu) Gemi/nus For(o) Germ(anorum)/ vet(eranus) Leg(ionis) [I]I Aug(ustae)/ an(norum) Ḷ h(ic) s(itus) e(st)/ he(res) c(uravit)/ e(x) t(estamento)

'To the souls of the departed: Lucius Valerius Geminus, the son of Lucius, of the Pollia voting district, from Forum Germanorum, veteran of the Second Augustan Legion, aged 50(?), lies here. His heir had this set up in accordance with his will.'

Material: originally white oobiosparite, a shelly oolithic limestone,[9] with light yellowish brown staining and dark blackish brown stains in places.
Overall measurements: 645 mm maximum width and 170 mm depth by 1360 mm preserved height.[10]

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chose to settle at Lincoln while it was still a legionary fortress (in the light of the gaps in our knowledge of legionary deployment, it is at least perfectly possible this legion had at some stage been based there) or after it had become a veteran colony, quite possibly as early as the A.D. 70s (Sauer 2005a, 210), is impossible to establish. On balance of probability the Lincoln veteran retired and died later than L. Valerius Geminus, but there is no certainty.

7 Sauer 2002a; cf. 2001b.

8 Birley 1981, 227; 1990, 8; Eichholz 1972; Franke 1991, vol. I, 35–7 no. 18; vol. II, 474–5.

9 Information kindly supplied by Dr Roy Clements, University of Leicester, 19 January 2004.

10 Original height: 1575 mm, on the assumption of a regular gable top, 1310 mm preserved and 1525 mm original height above ground plus a rectangular extension protruding beyond the flat base, preserved to 50 mm height. This wide tongue was undoubtedly designed to fit into a slot on a level stone surface. Remnants of fine lime mortar with traces of sand, as observed by Dr Graham Morgan (information kindly supplied, January 2004), suggest that mortar had been used to stabilise it in its upright position.

FIG. 1. Tombstone with inscription No. 1. The scale is 300 mm (3 x 100 mm) long.

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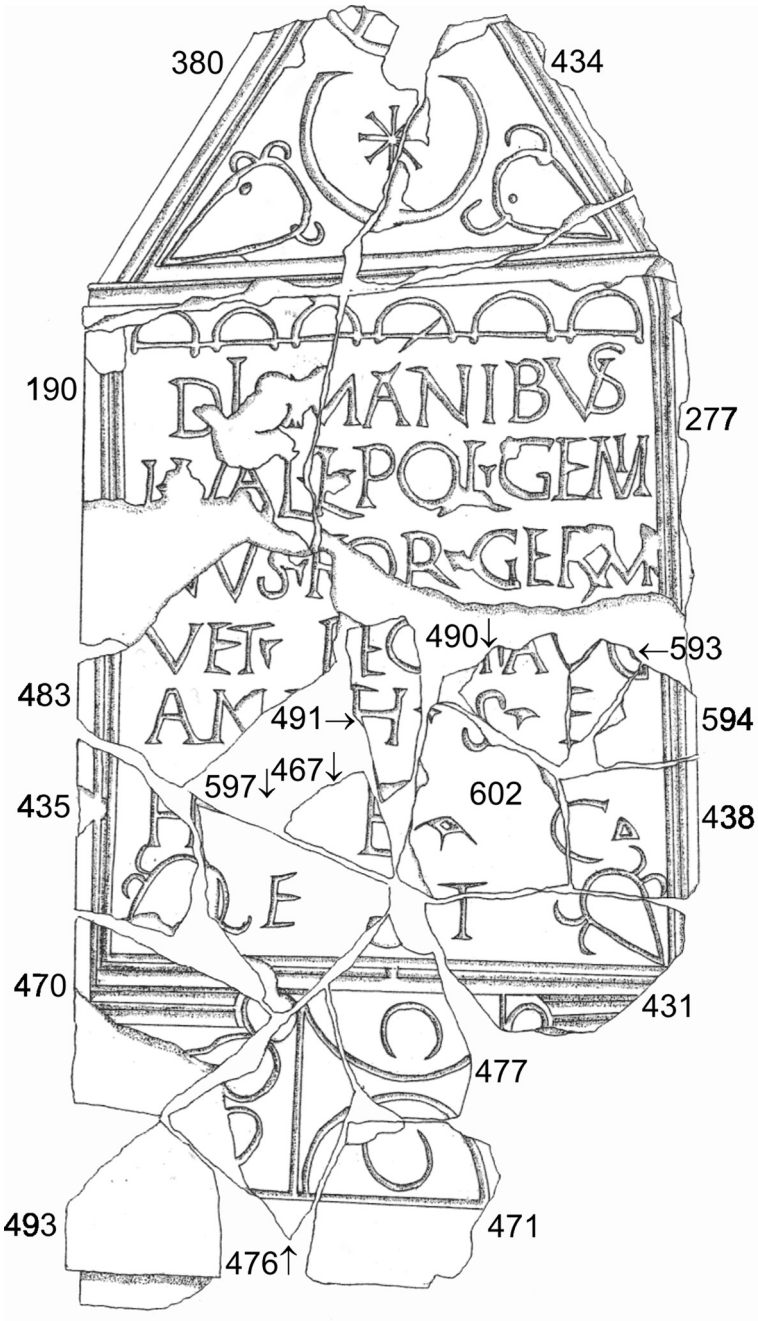

FIG. 2. Tombstone with inscription No. 1. Scale: 1:8. The numbers refer to Trench 41 small finds numbers (cf. FIG. 4 for the findspots). (*Drawn by Daniel Prior*)

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FIG. 3. Tombstone with inscription No. 1 with X-shaped decorations on its sides and the tongue at the bottom. Note that the bottom has been hacked into smaller fragments than the top. The scale is 300 mm (3 x 100 mm) long.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The inscription was found at the Roman town of Alchester, Oxfordshire (in the parish of Wendlebury), re-used, smashed into twenty recovered fragments, in the foundations of the town wall just north of the west gate (Trench 41) (FIGS 4–5). The majority of the fragments (15), and all the largest pieces, were recognised and recorded *in situ*. The civilian gate itself, a simple structure with a 2.95 m (ten Roman feet) wide opening and without projecting tower foundations, is not the subject of this article and will be discussed in an interim report[11] as well as in detail in the final report. Yet, a brief summary is necessary in order to appreciate the archaeological context of the inscription. Except for two stones, none of the upstanding masonry of the gate and town wall survived within Trench 41. It had been entirely robbed out, leaving only its rubble foundations. In addition to the twenty parts of the tombstone, fragments of a second inscription (No. 2 in the Appendix) and of an uninscribed sculpted stone (an altar top?), painted red, were found incorporated in the foundations. Both of these were found to the north of the fifteen fragments of inscription No. 1, whose three-dimensional position is known, and in close proximity to the limits of our excavations of this particular context, rendering it likely that further fragments of these and other stone monuments are embedded in the foundations further to the north. None of the re-used stone monument fragments was found south of the gate opening, notwithstanding the fact that about the same length of foundations, 4–5 m, has

[11] Sauer 2005b.

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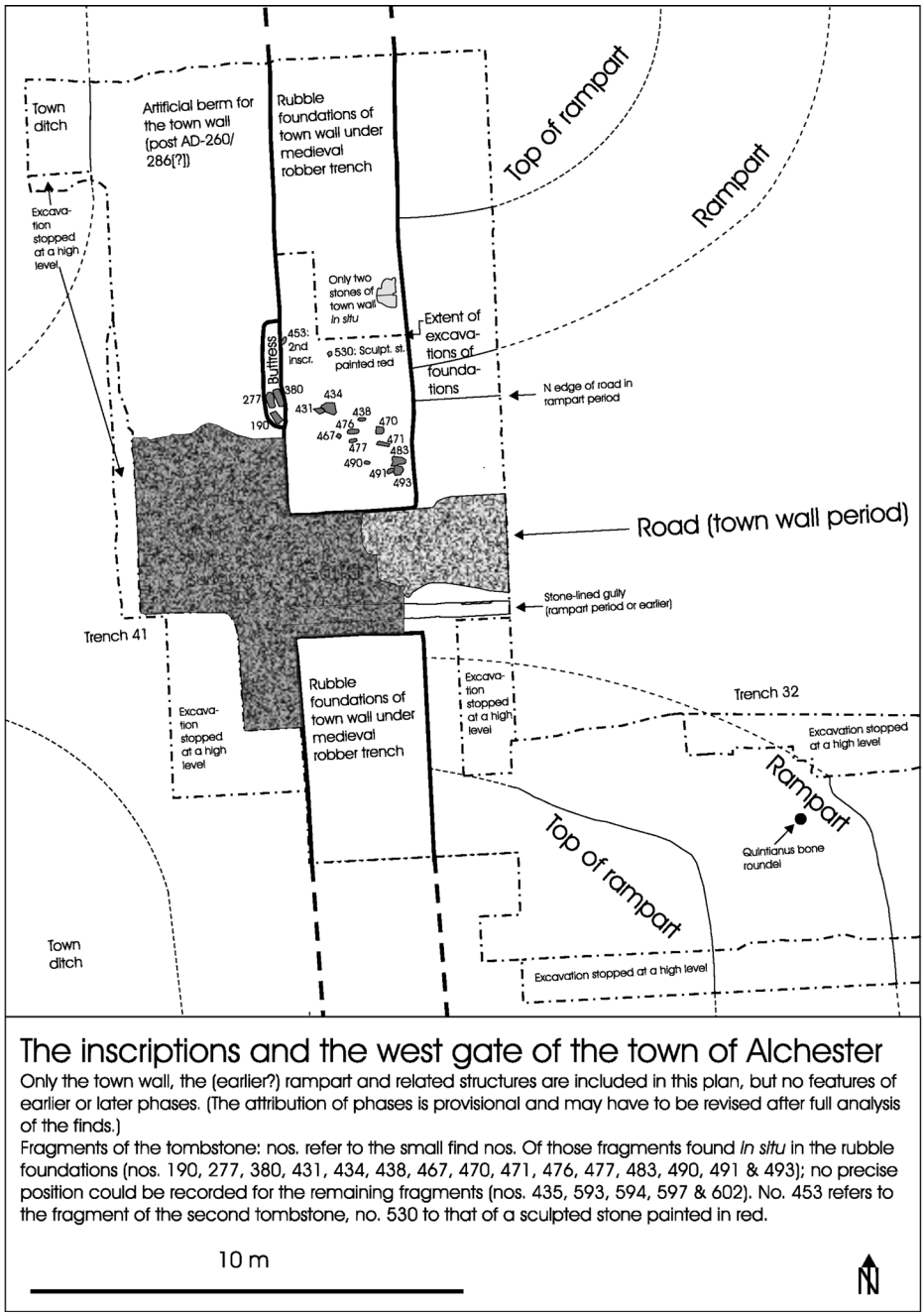

FIG. 4. The foundations of the town walls in the area of the west gate with the location of the inscription fragments.

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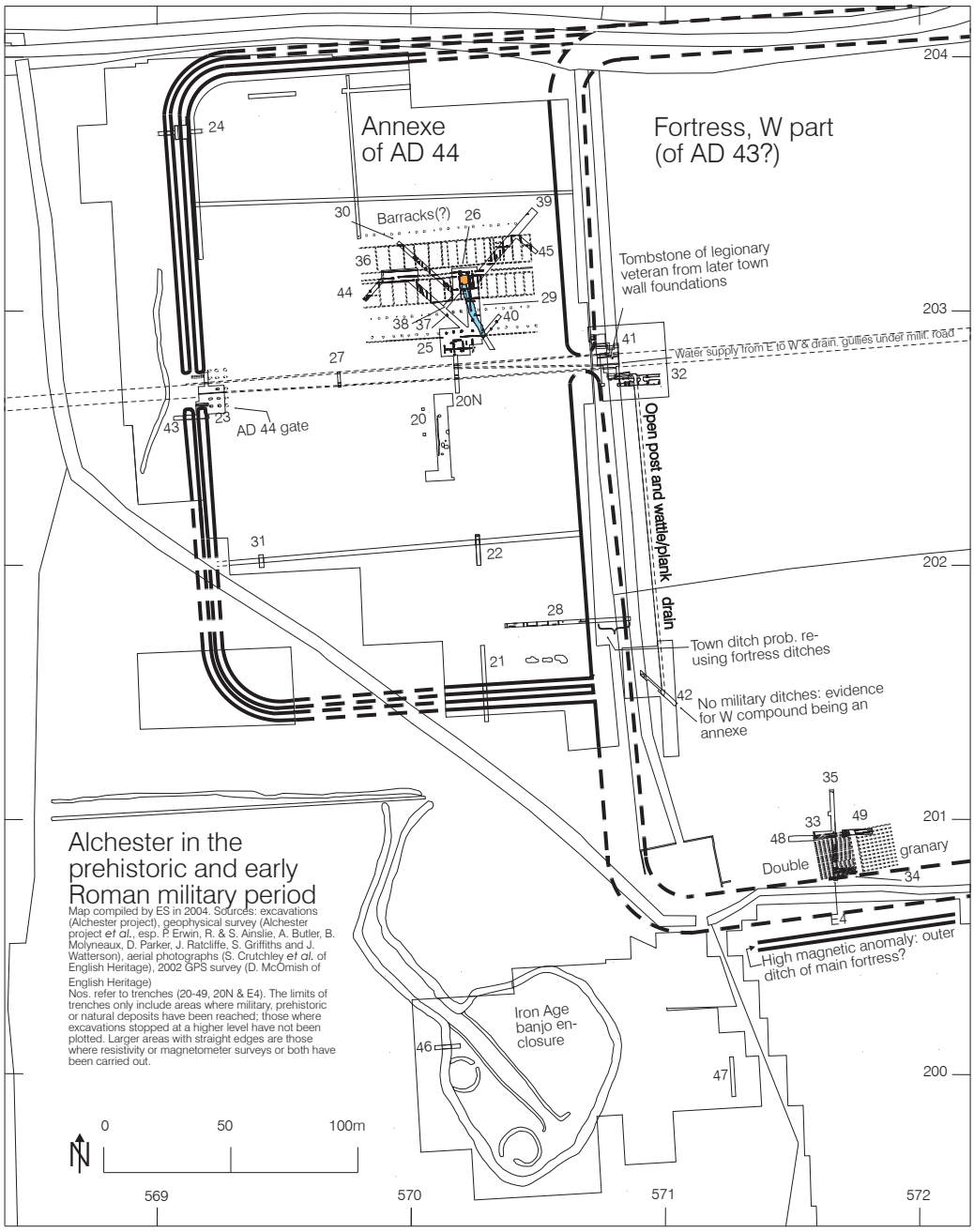

FIG. 5. The Alchester fortress and annexe with the location of the findspot of the tombstone.

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been excavated on either side. This suggests that two separate working parties were responsible for the two sections and only one of them used *spolia* in this area. Even the largest fragment of the tombstone (No. 277) can be lifted by a strong person, but the whole monument would require considerable efforts by a small team. It thus seems more likely that the monument was smashed at the cemetery and all or most of the fragments loaded on a wagon rather than that it was transported complete to the building site only to be broken up there. The graveyard in question most likely lay on one of the roads leading out of the town, though probably not in the immediate vicinity of the gate since, despite extensive excavations in this area between 1999 and 2003, we have so far encountered only one, probably late antique, burial and no traces of any early Roman cremations (unsurprising since the earlier military annexe extended 155 m to the west of the civilian gate). The fact that almost the whole inscribed stone was re-used in a small section suggests that the destruction of the monument and its re-use were not separated by any significant period of time and were probably carried out by the same people. There is no evidence to suggest that any of the inscription or decoration was deliberately mutilated any more than was necessary to split the large monolith into suitable building blocks for the foundations. We can thus be sure that the perpetrators had no specific ill-feelings towards the deceased or the institution he represented, but were solely motivated by the need to find building material at a time when security concerns were greater than any respect for the stone monuments erected by earlier generations.

The re-use of *spolia*, which occurs empire-wide but is more frequent on the Continent and in North Africa than in Britain, is normally a late Roman phenomenon, mainly from the mid-third century A.D. onwards.[12] The Alchester town wall was probably cut into the late second-century rampart after A.D. 260 (probably after A.D. 286).[13] This late *terminus post quem* for the construction of the town wall is based on coins embedded in artificially built-up deposits west of the wall, into which it was cut.[14] It seems likely that it will be possible to refine this date once the pottery has been analysed and the coins cleaned.[15]

LUCIUS VALERIUS GEMINUS

THE NAME OF THE DECEASED

The deceased, like all Roman citizens, had three names, a *praenomen*, L(ucius), a *nomen gentile*, family name, Valerius, and a *cognomen*, Geminus. All of these names are frequent and widespread in the Latin West of the Empire.[16] The non-imperial *nomen gentile* may hint that his family had possessed Roman citizenship for a while. His *cognomen* Geminus ('the twin') is interesting; it is possible that he was indeed a twin and that this inspired his parents to give him this descriptive name.[17]

HIS HOME AND EARLY MILITARY CAREER (FIG. 6)

Lucius Valerius Geminus was born and, presumably, grew up in the territory of Forum

12 Sauer 2003a, 48–9.
13 Young 1975, 150.
14 See Frere 1984, 63 on the phenomenon of reinforcing existing ramparts with walls.
15 On the difficulties in dating stone walls inserted in pre-existing ramparts see Crickmore 1984, 35–8.
16 Lörincz *et al.* 1999, 164; 2002, 143–6; cf. Mócsy *et al.* 1983, 135, 300.
17 Kajanto 1965, 73, 75–6, 294 with examples.

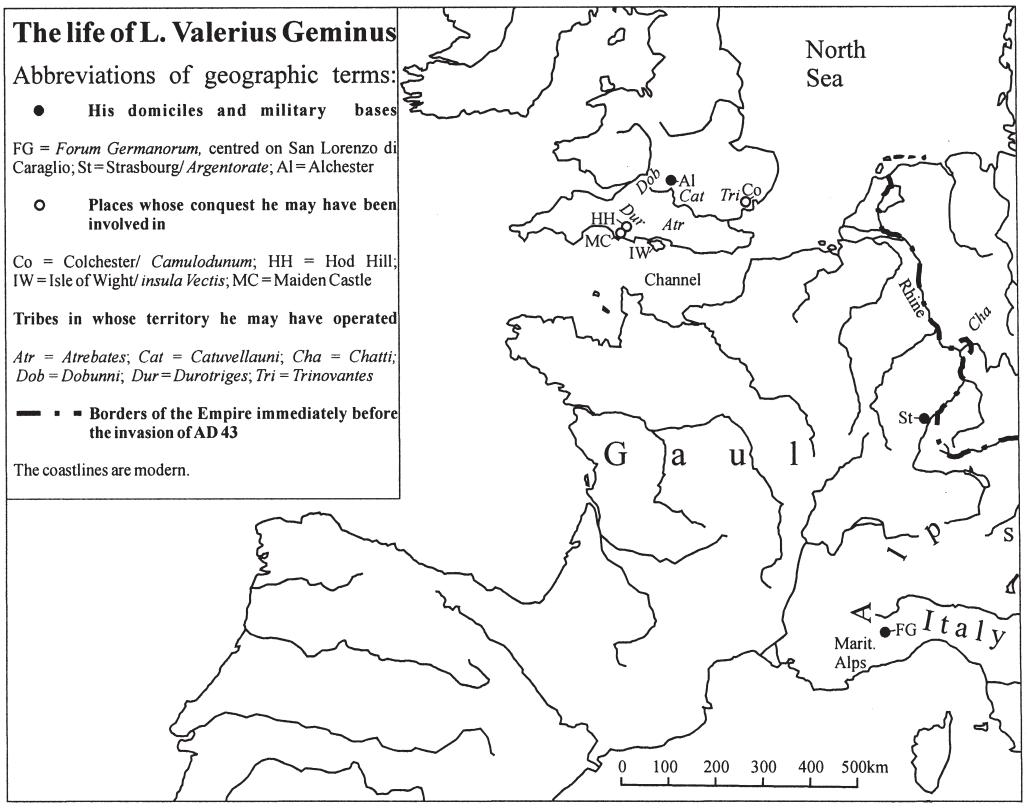

FIG. 6. Stations in the life of L. Valerius Geminus.

Germa(norum or, possibly, -nici) in north-west Italy. The inscription provides the earliest independently dated testimony for this community. What it contributes to the history of this marginal administrative area and the life story of the veteran has been discussed in a separate article[18] and thus shall not be reiterated here except for a brief summary of his career. On the probable assumption that he retired during Alchester's military occupation (A.D. 43/44–*c.* A.D. 60), or at least not long thereafter, and subtracting his likely period of service (25 to just over 30 years), he probably joined the army under Tiberius (A.D. 14–37). Italy still provided the majority of legionary recruits at that time. He would first have served at Strasbourg, then the base of the Second Augustan Legion. The legion and thus, probably, Lucius Valerius Geminus appear to have been involved in Caligula's much maligned expedition into Germany in A.D. 39,[19] the military significance of which is disputed.[20] Around A.D. 41 or 42, Vespasian took command of the legion.[21] The future emperor is reported to have fought against the Germans before the Roman invasion of Britain. Josephus' effusive praise of his imperial patron and Silius Italicus'

18 Sauer 2005a.
19 *CIL* III, 6809; Birley 1990, 10.
20 Becker 1992, 228–30.
21 Franke 1991, vol. I, 35–7 no. 18.

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similarly laudatory comments,[22] both writing under the Flavian dynasty, probably contain at least a core of truth since there is other evidence for war in Germany at the time, including Galba's defeat of the Chatti in A.D. 41.[23] It is likely that L. Valerius Geminus was involved in these operations in Germany; it is certain that he must have taken part in the Roman invasion of Britain.

HIS AGE AT DEATH AND THE DATE OF THE TOMBSTONE

The upper serif of a vertical or diagonal line is all that survives of the number indicating his age (FIG. 2). Yet, the gap between this serif and *h(ic) s(itus) e(st)* is rather small and does not allow for more than one letter or, at most, two, if one of them was an 'I'. Since 'C' has no such serif and since he, obviously, must have reached an age above 'X', the letter (or one of the two) must have been an 'L'. 'IL' would only be possible if the 'L' was narrower than any preserved letter in this line, 'LI' is more likely, should the 'I' have been inserted above the 'L' (as above the 'M' in line 2); 'L', especially in the light of the frequency of age rounding at the time, is the most probable restoration. Of course, the phenomenon of age rounding equally suggests that his age at death may not have been precisely fifty, but a comparative statistical analysis suggests that it is unlikely to have deviated by more than a few years at most from the figure. Further calculations, taking into account his likely recruitment age — late teens or early twenties — as well as the average period of service at the time, indicate that he is unlikely to have retired before his early forties, but equally he could have been in service until shortly before his death at the age of around fifty; on statistical average, he only enjoyed four years of retirement and, even under optimal circumstances, the chances that he survived his discharge from service by more than a decade are quite low. (These calculations, and the comparative data on which they are based, are presented elsewhere.[24]) We may thus conclude that, even if he had retired as late as the postulated withdrawal of the Alchester garrison around A.D. 60, his death and the tombstone are unlikely to postdate the A.D. 60s (though the early A.D. 70s are still just within the limits of possibility). It is more probable that he left active service in the A.D. 40s or 50s and died within a few years of his retirement. The epigraphic formulae do not allow similar precision, but it is worth noting that *h(ic) s(itus) e(st)* is often found on mid-first-century A.D. military tombstones, though would not be surprising in a late first-century epitaph either. *Dis Manibus*, while sometimes thought to be an indicator of a Flavian or later date, occurs in Italy under Augustus and on provincial tombstones at the latest in the Neronian, or probably Claudian, period.[25] The archaeological context is of no help in achieving further chronological precision as it proves only that the monument pre-dates the construction of the town wall.

THE SHAPE AND ICONOGRAPHY OF THE MONUMENT (FIGS 1–3)

The shape of the monument, a stele with a roof-shaped top, is amongst the most common types of Roman military and civilian gravestones and may have been associated with the idea of a mausoleum or house of the dead. It was particularly common at first-century military bases in the Rhineland where three of the four legions involved in the Roman invasion of Britain,

22 Joseph., *BJ* 3.4; Sil., *Pun.* 3.599.
23 Cass. Dio 60.8.7; Becker 1992, 230 with further references.
24 Sauer 2005a, 207–10.
25 Sauer 2005a, 206.

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including the *Legio II Augusta* at *Argentorate* (Strasbourg), had previously been based.[26] Indeed, L. Valerius Geminus must have spent his early career at Strasbourg and will have been familiar with the types of tombstones in fashion. Similar monuments were, however, equally erected in northern Italy, and it has long been recognised that the development of sepulchral art in the Rhineland in the first century A.D. has to be seen against the background of similar monuments from northern Italy, the main recruitment area for legionaries at the time.[27] In the light of the origin of the soldiers of the invasion army and the locations of their previous bases, it is not surprising that steles with gabled tops are one of the most common types of tombstone at early military bases in Britain.[28]

The stylised or geometrical decorations do not carry any obvious pictorial message, except for the crescent enclosing an eight-point star in the centre of the gable top. Interestingly, the moon crescent and star never became a popular motif on tombstones in the Rhineland, but there are numerous examples from across the Empire, including the eastern Alpine region and Gaul.[29] The fact that an extensive compilation of Roman steles from Piedmont[30] does not include a single specimen with lunar decoration in the gable top suggests that the artistic and religious tradition which led L. Valerius Geminus, his heir, or the stonemason, to choose this particular motif was rooted elsewhere (e.g. in Gaul?) rather than in the deceased's homeland, even though the motif is known from elsewhere in Italy.[31] While the Alchester specimen may well be the earliest preserved representation of its kind in Britain, crescent-decorated gable tops of tombstones also became popular in Britain.[32] Several of them, interestingly, come from Caerleon, the base of the Second Augustan Legion from *c*. A.D. 74/75 onwards.[33] While it is difficult to be certain what this symbolism meant to individuals and while we should not assume that everybody in antiquity would have agreed on a specific single interpretation, I would follow Franz Cumont, to whom we owe the most extensive treatment on the subject, to the extent that such lunar and celestial symbols were most likely associated with the thought of an afterlife.[34]

The unusual motifs occurring in four of the corners differ in size and the number of attached bow-shaped appendices. The tombstone may well have been the work of the best or only stonemason working at Alchester at the time (bearing in mind that there was neither a military nor a civilian local tradition in sculpting stone for the purposes of art and architecture). Obviously, limited funds might just as well account for the imperfect symmetry of the monument as limited availability of trained sculptors. We equally cannot rule out the possibility that the tombstone could have been imported from elsewhere.[35]

The habit of setting up a tombstone, which was so important to L. Valerius Geminus that he made specific provisions in his will, does not appear to have ever gained wide popularity in Roman Oxfordshire (or, indeed, the habit of setting up inscriptions at all). Apart from this

26 *CSIR Deutschland passim*; Espérandieu 1918, 5495; 1928, 7296.

27 Gabelmann 1972, 67–70 with references.

28 *RIB* I and Anderson 1984 *passim*.

29 No complete list of tombstones with a crescent with or without star(s) can be offered here, but see Kooy 1981 and Cumont 1942, 177–252 *passim*; cf. Linckenheld 1927, 26, 77–80, 97–101; *CSIR Österreich* I, 4, 496–8; II, 5, 401–7; Espérandieu 1931, 79; Walter 1974, 12, 80, 162.

30 Mercando and Paci 1998.

31 Diebner 1987, pl. 42c.

32 *CSIR Great Britain* I, 1, 268; I, 6, 235; I, 7, 143–5; cf. *RIB passim*.

33 *CSIR Great Britain* I, 5, 20–2, 24.

34 Cumont 1942, 177–252; cf. Kooy 1981; Linckenheld 1927, 97–101; see also Davies 2003 on the general problems with very specific interpretations of early imperial funerary symbolism.

35 Dr Roy Clements's brief examination (information kindly supplied on 19 January 2004) suggests the Cotswold limestone as a possible source and, while the stone for this and the inscription No. 2 were, obviously, from different beds, they could conceivably come from the same quarry.

specimen and, probably, a second from Alchester (No. 2 below, raising the possibility that the largest town in the area might have formed an exception to the rule), only one other, very fragmentary, tombstone has ever been found in the area of the modern county.[36] L. Valerius Geminus, having been brought up in northern Italy and having spent parts of his military career in the Rhineland, had been familiar with the culture of stone inscriptions from younger years and, in Britain, he remained a stranger in a foreign land, even in the way he wanted to be commemorated after death.

THE BASE OF THE SECOND AUGUSTAN LEGION

TABLE 1: LEGIONARY VETERANS SETTLING IN BRITAIN
(the monuments are tombstones unless otherwise stated)[37]

Inscription	**Legion**	**Findspot**	**Age at death**
Individual legionary *veterani*			
RIB 478	*II Ad(iutrix)*	Chester	?
Alchester No. 1	*II Aug(usta)*	Alchester	prob. 50 (or 51, or 49?)
RIB 359	*II A(ugusta)*	Caerleon	45
RIB 361	*II Aug(usta)*	Caerleon	?
RIB 363	*II Aug(usta)*	Caerleon	100 'C' [sic!]
Hassall and Tomlin 1977, 429 no. 15	*II Aug(usta)*	Caerleon	70
RIB 252	*VI Vic(trix) P(ia) F(idelis)*	Lincoln	?
RIB 679	*[VI] Vic(trix)*	York	?
RIB 685	*VI Vic(trix)*	York	? epitaph for his wife (aged 39 years, 7 months and 11 days), his son (aged 1 year and 3 days), and his daughter (aged 1 year, 9 months and 5 days) and himself, but apparently set up during his lifetime
RIB 249	*XIIII [Gem(ina)]*	Lincoln	45, 85, or 95 '[---]XXXV'
Hassall and Tomlin 1984, 333 no. 1, pl. XXIV	*XX*	Gloucester	?
RIB 495	*XX V(aleria) V(ictrix)*	Chester	?
RIB 500	*XX V(aleria) V(ictrix)*	Chester	45

[36] *RIB* 240 from Wood Eaton.

[37] Hassall and Tomlin (1984, 333 no. 1; cf. pl. XXIV) argue that the Gloucester tombstone may date to the third century A.D. on the basis of the abbreviation DM, the imperial *nomen gentile*, and stylistic criteria; if so, it is, of course, conceivable that at this late date we are dealing with a veteran who returned to what could have been his home (cf. Dobson and Mann 1973, 202) or chose to settle in the old colony for some other reason. Mann 1983, 91–2 tab. 10 includes also *RIB* 367 from Caerleon which is excluded here as being too uncertain.

TABLE 1 (Cont.)

Inscription	Legion	Findspot	Age at death
Uncertain example for a possible legionary *veteranus*			
RIB 2151	*VI Vic(trix) [P(ia)] F(idelis)*	Castlecary	?altar set up during his lifetime
***Veterani* without specification as to whether they had served in a legionary or auxiliary unit, but buried at a legionary fortress**			
RIB 358	prob. (II Augusta)	Caerleon	65
RIB 517	poss. (XX Valeria Victrix)?	Chester	80
RIB 526	poss. (XX Valeria Victrix)?	Chester	80
RIB 534	poss. (XX Valeria Victrix)?	Chester	80 to 95 'LXXX[..$^{1-2}$]'
Emeriti			
RIB 3	II Aug(usta)	London	?dedication set up during his lifetime
RIB 160	XX	Bath	45

All tombstones of legionary veterans found in Britain derive from the site or immediate vicinity of a legionary fortress or a colony. There is not a single specimen found next to an auxiliary fort or at any civilian site where there had been no legionary base during the lifetime of the soldier. Not one, for example, has been found on Hadrian's Wall or in its hinterland, notwithstanding extensive legionary deployment on the northern frontier, nor one at a smaller fort known or thought to have housed a legionary vexillation. The only possible epigraphic testimony for a veteran at any site other than a permanent legionary fortress is an altar from Castlecary on the Antonine Wall. It appears to have been set up by a *ve[t(eranus)] Leg(ionis) VI V(ictricis) [P(iae)] F(idelis)*; in the context of the text it appears unlikely that 'VE[.^{1}]' refers to a member of a vexillation. However, the inscription is a most unusual monument: it ends with the usual dedication formula 'VSLLM', yet there is neither a dedication to a deity nor space for a dedication. This raises some doubts as to whether the old drawing, the only surviving record of this lost votive inscription, is reliable. The rest of the text is, however, perfectly acceptable. As it is the only monument naming a *veteranus* included in Table 1 which is not a tombstone, we cannot be certain whether the dedicator chose to spend his last years on the Antonine Wall or whether he set it up on some other occasion (e.g. shortly after retirement and before commencing his return journey to York?).

Finally, the two British legionary *emeriti* merit investigation, as, being attested in London and Bath, they do not conform to the same pattern as the *veterani*. The term *emeritus* is often thought to be synonymous with *veteranus*, but this is a matter of debate. A survey of the epigraphic evidence suggests that the *emeriti* were in fact often, if not always, soldiers who had completed their normal term of service, but had not yet been released from the army.[38] The Mithraic votive relief set up by the *emeritus* in London is dated on artistic grounds to the late second or early

[38] Clauss 1999, 43; Neumann 1962, 1598; Sablayrolles 1995, 135–6; 1996, 222–3; Schallmayer *et al.* 1990, nos 23 (= *CIL* XIII, 3983), 29, 899–900 (= *CIL* VI, 1057–8), 939 (= *CIL* VI, 37295); *CIL* VI, 1056; cf. Domaszewski 1967, 11; see also Anon. 1926 with cross-references.

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third century A.D.[39] when London was a provincial capital. Bath, the only site in Britain where thermal water of over 40ºC is available, served as an army spa for the whole of Britain. Whether these two men were dispatched to such central sites on some special duty or whether they were indeed veterans, there is no reason to argue that they disprove the general pattern that the *veterani* of the British legions tended to settle down at their base, a colony, or their hometown.

Since there is otherwise not a single example of a legionary *veteranus* buried at any site in Britain other than a main legionary fortress (or a veteran colony), it seems unlikely that L. Valerius Geminus should form the only exception to the rule. Even on the unlikely and purely speculative assumption that he died on a journey, his ashes would probably have been transferred to his domicile and that of his heir, or at least the tombstone erected there, especially in the light of the expensive provisions specifically provided for in his will.[40] Furthermore, Table 1 demonstrates that the legionary veterans known to have settled in Britain were always buried at a colony or at the fortress site where their own legion was or had been based and where, presumably, they had served, rather than at the fortress of a different unit.

The reasons why many soldiers chose to settle at their main bases are not hard to guess. The period of service at that time seldom amounted to less than 25 and not infrequently to more than 30 years.[41] After such a long period of absence from their homes in Italy or distant provinces at a time with a much lower life expectancy, a large proportion of those people they had known in their youth would have died or else would have been almost strangers to them. It is thus little surprise that, while some returned, many preferred to settle at the base in the company of their former comrades and fellow veterans and where many, presumably, would have had local partners and often children (even if they had not been allowed to enter into an official marriage during active service). Whilst we cannot be sure, there is a strong probability that the unspecified *he(res)*, heir, was a member of L. Valerius Geminus' family.

Notwithstanding his emphasis on how unattractive the climate of the northern provinces was for people of Mediterranean origin,[42] Tacitus provides an interesting glimpse as to how unpopular an enforced repatriation to or settlement in Italy was. Nero had in A.D. 60, quite possibly during the lifetime of L. Valerius Geminus or, at most, one and a half decades after his death, settled veterans at Antium and Tarentum on Italy's Mediterranean coast; inscriptions suggest that, in the case of Tarentum, the veterans had probably come from Moesia and Syria, though not necessarily exclusively. Far from enjoying retirement in a milder climate, many returned to the frontier provinces in which they had served. One of the factors specifically mentioned as contributing to their unhappiness in Italy was that legions had not been kept together, so that the former soldiers had been torn apart from their comrades and were strangers to each other in their new homes.[43] Furthermore, considering that L. Valerius Geminus had come from the foothills of the Alps or even an Alpine valley, he may have been used to cold and wet weather, and the British climate may not have seemed that unattractive.

Mann's empire-wide study of legionary veterans confirms that a large proportion chose to settle at their old bases, while some preferred to return to their home towns and others settled

[39] Shepherd 1998, 174.

[40] On the transfer or intended transfer of bones or cremated remains see *CIL* XIII, 8648; *RIB* 369. Whether or not Maxfield (2002, 145) is right in arguing that the remains of the soldier commemorated on the latter epitaph, who died on a German expedition, were presumably not brought back and buried at Caerleon, the findspot of the monument, is impossible to decide. What matters in our context is that his sister chose to set up the tombstone for him and his mother next to the grave of his father at the family home and not at the place where he had died.

[41] Forni 1953, 37–8; 142.

[42] Tac., *Agr.* 12.3; Tac., *Germ.* 2.1.

[43] Tac., *Ann.* 14.27; cf. Keppie 1984, esp. 81–91, 108–11 and Mann 1983, 56–7 on the epigraphic evidence for the military units affected.

at veteran colonies. In Britain there were no veteran colonies at places other than the former legionary fortresses of Colchester, Gloucester, and Lincoln (of which probably only Colchester existed at the time of the retirement of L. Valerius Geminus).[44] In other provinces occasionally major towns in reach of legionary bases attracted veterans, but Alchester neither developed into a major town nor was it near another legionary fortress. It is hard to find in Mann's extensive compilation of data examples of ex-legionaries who chose to retire at minor bases with legionary vexillations in recently conquered provinces. The North African epitaphs of the period A.D. 117–238, which attest that a number of former legionaries settled in the frontier zone at sites other than the main base (Lambaesis), cannot easily be compared with Britain. Not only was North Africa, having by then been under Roman rule for between 160 and 300 years, much more Romanised in this period than Britain under Claudius and Nero, but, in complete contrast to first-generation Roman Britain, there was also predominantly local recruitment[45] (whilst in Claudian and Neronian Britain there had been none at all[46] and thus also no old family ties between veterans and people living in settlements far away from their former bases).

Thus the likelihood that after his retirement L. Valerius Geminus would have chosen, for personal or economic reasons, to settle at a place other than the present or former main base of his legion is remote; indeed, if he did, he would be the only person known to have done so in Roman Britain. Therefore there can be little doubt that Alchester once housed all or, at the very least, a significant portion of the Second Augustan Legion and the only questions to be answered are when it arrived, when it departed, and whether it had been the whole legion or what proportion of it.

If Alchester had housed soldiers of the Second Augustan Legion in sufficiently large numbers and for a sufficiently long period of time to make it attractive as a place for veteran settlement, then the following options are worth considering:

1. Alchester was the sole base for the legion at the time (whether or not there was also a small number of auxiliaries stationed at the base).
2. Alchester was the main base for the legion and housed at least half of the unit while there were major detachments elsewhere.
3. Alchester was one of two or three contemporary 'vexillation fortresses' which housed strong contingents of legionaries (roughly a half or a third each) mixed with auxiliary contingents of roughly similar numerical strength; none of these 'vexillation fortresses' emerges clearly as the main base.
4. Alchester was, despite the caveats above, a mainly auxiliary campaign base with a minor legionary contingent.

Early legionary fortresses in Britain, notably Exeter and Lincoln (both *c*. 16.6 ha),[47] were noticeably smaller than the average later legionary fortress. However, Henderson has made a strong case for Exeter housing the full legion and there even having been space for two additional auxiliary cohorts.[48] Why the first-generation legionary bases in Britain were smaller, is open to debate. It is worth noting that during the Flavian expansion into Germany east of the

[44] Hurst 1999b. Fulford's (1999, esp. 177; cf. Hassall 1999, 183) tentative model, that all veterans opting to stay in Britain within a decade of the foundation of the Roman colony at Colchester in A.D. 49 might have been sent there, is unlikely to be correct, but he is almost certainly right that the majority of veterans chose to remain in Britain.

[45] Mann 1983 *passim*.

[46] Forni 1953 and 1992 *passim*; Holder 1982, 46–7; cf. 51–2; Dobson and Mann 1973, 198–9.

[47] Henderson 1988, 95; Wacher 1995, 132.

[48] Henderson 1988, 95, 96 fig. 5.3, 103.

middle and upper Rhine similarly-sized fortresses were built: one of *c*. 16 ha at Rottweil[49] and one of 14 ha or slightly over at Hanau-Kesselstadt.[50] Maybe the situation remained insecure and thus there may have been a desire to keep the perimeter to be defended as small as possible while accelerating completion of the building works. It is also possible that amenities, like bath-houses, were kept smaller[51] because of the transient nature of the Roman occupation and because even when planned and constructed there was no expectation that the base would remain in the same position for a long-enough period of time to merit too elaborate an infrastructure. In Roman marching camps, it ought to be remembered, even less space could be allocated to a legion.[52] If it is accepted that the 16.6 ha fortress at Exeter could have housed as many as twelve cohorts (the ten legionary cohorts plus two auxiliary cohorts), then Alchester, whose approximate size, including the densely occupied annexe, amounts to 14–15 ha, could have housed the ten cohorts of the Second Legion after the construction of the annexe defences in autumn A.D. 44. The dimensions of the main fortress (*c*. 10–11 ha) are likely to be very close to those of the remarkably rectangular town which succeeded it, as a double granary was situated at the very southern margins of the area. It is worth stressing that the Second Legion's earlier, late Augustan to early Tiberian, fortress at Strasbourg appears to have been as small as 12 ha.[53] It is possible that the Alchester annexe with its symmetrical two-part layout was built for two legionary cohorts re-united with the rest of their unit after the end of the campaigning season in A.D. 44, whilst they had been needed elsewhere in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. As an alternative, we ought to consider the option that an auxiliary reinforcement of two cohorts or a cohort and an *ala* was dispatched to Alchester in A.D. 44 for some local or strategic reasons (e.g. popular unrest in the area or its hinterland?).

The exclusive presence in Britain of legionary veterans' tombstones at the main bases makes one doubt whether a smaller legionary contingent would have formed a large enough nucleus to spark off the creation of a separate veteran settlement. The 6.35-ha fort at Aulnay de Saintonge in western Gaul housed vexillations of both the Second and the Fourteenth Legions and one soldier of the former and two of the latter legion (though no veterans) are known to have been buried there. The numismatic evidence for the occupation puts it firmly within the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) and it has been plausibly suggested that its establishment followed the Gallic uprising of A.D. 21 and that it was abandoned after less than a decade of occupation.[54]

Yet, while it is well known that legionary vexillations were sent to frontier territories and outpost forts to undertake numerous specialised functions and tasks, such as military construction works,[55] the question needs to be asked as to what extent Rome would have split up its largest and best-trained infantry combat units during the invasion of Britain, a period of active warfare. Hassall[56] has recently provided a very useful summary of past scholars' views on the matter, and has pointed out that the division of several legions over two or even three vexillation fortresses, claimed, notably by Frere,[57] to have occurred during the Roman invasion of Britain,

[49] Kortüm and Schlipf 2002.
[50] Czysz 1977/78; 1989.
[51] Bidwell 1979, 13; Henderson 1988, 98.
[52] Summary of sources and figures in Johnson 1983, 27–30.
[53] Petry 1988, 40; cf. Waton 1988; Keppie 1993, 17. It is worth stressing, however, that there is some uncertainty about its precise dimensions, even though it appears to have been significantly smaller than its 20-ha successor (Reddé 1996b, 204–5).
[54] Tassaux *et al.* 1984, esp. 148–55; *CIL* XIII, 1121–3; Tronche 1983; 1994; 1996.
[55] Tac., *Ann.* 12.38 (kind reference by Dr Simon Esmonde Cleary) is interesting in this context, but refers to legionary cohorts constructing *praesidia* rather than necessarily to any intention of manning the completed *praesidia* with legionaries.
[56] Hassall 2000b.
[57] Frere and St Joseph 1974, 6–7, 34–5; Frere 1987, 55–7, 61–2, 211.

would be without good parallels elsewhere in the Empire. Not even the above-quoted example of the 6.35-ha fort at Aulnay entitles us to the assumption that 50 per cent or less of the Second or Fourteenth Legion remained at Strasbourg or Mainz respectively. I have to concede that I myself previously regarded Frere's theory as the best explanation of the presence of numerous fortresses of roughly 'half-legionary' size (*c*. 8–12 ha),[58] and if the splitting of legions into several of these bases was anomalous, so was the sheer number of such smaller fortresses which exceeds that in any other part of the Empire as far as I am aware. However, they do exist elsewhere, e.g. at Augsburg.[59] Most significantly in our context, the above-mentioned *c*. 12-ha fortress at Strasbourg renders it at least conceivable that some of the larger so-called 'vexillation fortresses' could have accommodated a whole legion or most of it. Furthermore, the question must be asked how one legionary commander, initially Vespasian in the case of the Second Augustan Legion, could have effectively led or controlled a legion split into two or three contingents of similar size and stationed far apart, not to mention the resulting reduction in the fighting strength of each vexillation.

This question has been thrown into sharp relief by the discovery of evidence for the presence of the Second Legion at Alchester. If this were one of two or three vexillation fortresses, where was or were the other(s)? Previous suggestions centre on Lake Farm and Dorchester in Dorset, Chichester, and Silchester. Hassall, who provides a most useful summary of previous theories on the movements of the Second Augustan Legion before its arrival at Exeter, favours Silchester as its (sole) base from A.D. 43 to 49 and Dorchester or Lake Farm in Dorset from A.D. 49 to 55.[60] Of these only Silchester is in some proximity to Alchester and even it is about two days' march away. Furthermore, the excavator, Michael Fulford, no longer believes that there is any firm evidence for military buildings in the centre of the town.[61] At Dorchester in Dorset, no fort or fortress has ever been found and, while the same could have been said less than a decade ago about Alchester, it, nevertheless, does not make it a strong candidate as long as no further evidence emerges. Lake Farm, by contrast, is most definitely a large fortress, but the material from its occupation, while still remaining largely unpublished, leaves no doubt that its foundation post-dates that of nearby Hod Hill and Alchester by at least several years, if not a decade, as I had already argued long before I considered Alchester to have any connection with the Second Legion.[62] We will come back to this when discussing the literary evidence for the activities of Vespasian as legate of the Second Legion. Hod Hill is too small for a vexillation fortress. This leaves us with Chichester which has certainly yielded material of an early date comparable to Alchester.[63] Leaving aside the doubts about the permanent nature of the military occupation expressed by Frere, Fulford, and Hassall,[64] the question arises how, even if it were a vexillation fortress of the Second Augustan Legion, Vespasian or any of his successors could have effectively commanded bases on the south coast and in the Midlands at the same time. In Caesar's Gallic War rebels managed to intercept communication between stronger bases at closer proximity to each other and to annihilate the garrison of one of them without anybody being able to offer support or even knowing about the attack before it was too late.[65] If Alchester

58 Sauer 2001a, 28–9.
59 Bakker 2000, 88–90.
60 Hassall 2000b with further literature; 2000a, 442–4, 449–51; cf. Brewer 2002b, 2–3; Manning 2002, 28–30; Webster 1993b, 124, 148; Henderson 1988, 91; Holder 1982, 104; Field 1992.
61 Fulford and Timby 2000, 565–7, but see also Boon 2000.
62 Sauer 2001a, 44–9 with fig. 17.
63 Sauer 2001a, 48–9 with fig. 18.
64 Frere and Fulford 2001, 54; Hassall 2000b, 61.
65 Caes., *B. Gall.* 5.24–53.

were a vexillation fortress, its counterpart(s) ought to be sought in closer proximity and, as yet, none has been found.

Some proponents of the conventional hypothesis that Vespasian's headquarters were in or in the vicinity of the territory of the Durotriges will resort to the explanation that L. Valerius Geminus must have been a member of a minor detachment posted to this northerly base and that the headquarters have to be sought much further south. There can be no doubt that legionaries were dispatched for special duties on some occasions; indeed, under Nero (A.D. 54–68), whether before or after the move to Exeter or both is a matter of debate, a detachment of the Second Legion appears to have been involved in the exploitation of lead in the Mendips.[66] However, the very fact that L. Valerius Geminus chose to settle at Alchester after the end of his service, which not one other ex-legionary in Britain can be shown to have done at a site merely housing a detachment, strongly argues against such a hypothesis. In the light of the early date of its foundation, it is equally not possible to claim that Alchester formed the successor to a fortress in the central south coast region, unless one resorts to the unlikely hypothesis that the Second Augustan Legion replaced an unknown earlier garrison in the later A.D. 40s or A.D. 50s without making, as far as we know, any changes to the defensive perimeter (at least not to that of the annexe). It seems much more likely that Alchester housed all or, at least, the majority of the soldiers of the Second Augustan Legion as its similarly sized predecessor at Strasbourg had done. The postulated 12 ha extent of the legionary fortress at Strasbourg is not only strikingly close to the size of what was probably its immediate successor at Alchester, it also indicates that not every permanent military installation of this size was necessarily a vexillation fortress.

VESPASIAN

If Alchester was indeed the first base of the Second Augustan Legion in Britain, as the evidence strongly suggests, then this has major historical implications. Vespasian, who was to become emperor from A.D. 69 to 79, was, famously, the commander of the Second Legion at the time.[67] He had become its legate while the legion was based at Strasbourg and led it, then aged 33, as part of the invasion force in A.D. 43 into Britain. Eichholz and Birley have powerfully argued that it is unlikely that he would have been withdrawn as early as A.D. 44 as some previously believed. It is now generally accepted that the future emperor, who gained extensive military experience whilst in Britain, probably stayed until about A.D. 47.[68] The timber gate to the annexe of the Alchester fortress has been dated, on the basis of two tree-ring analyses with identical results by Ian Tyers, to between October A.D. 44 and March A.D. 45 (i.e. almost certainly autumn A.D. 44, the normal time of the year to construct winter-quarters). The main fortress is likely to pre-date the annexe and, since it is improbable that it would have been built during the campaigning season, it probably dates to A.D. 43.

[66] *RIB* 2404.24 = *CIL* XIII, 3491; cf. *RIB* 2404.2; Jarrett 1964, 50. Elkington (1976, 186) and Whittick (1982, 118–20) argue that a pig dated to 1 July A.D. 60 (*RIB* 2404.3) indicates that the mines had by then ceased to be under the control of the Second Legion (which would probably imply that it had been under the control of the Second Legion while it still was based at Alchester), while Fulford (1996, 12) argues for continued military supervision. In contrast to the Mendips, it seems unlikely that there was ever a legionary detachment at Claydon Pike in Gloucestershire. There are at least major doubts as to whether the graffito, *leg(io) II A[ug(usta)]*, inscribed on the inner surface of a not closely datable amphora (from a late context) after the vessel had been broken, is genuine, especially in the light of modern-style lettering (*RIB* 2494.139; II.6, pl. VII.B; Frere 1983, 314; information kindly supplied by Paul Booth, Oxford Archaeology, 15 January 2004).

[67] Tac., *Hist.* 3.44.

[68] Birley 1981, 227; 1990, 8; Eichholz 1972; cf. Franke 1991, vol. I, 36.

If Alchester was one of two or three vexillation fortresses, then, presumably, Vespasian spent a considerable period of time there. If it was the legion's headquarters or main base (as seems much more likely), he would probably have spent most of his time outside the campaigning season there. It is possible that the fortress was built after the fall of Colchester and the end of the campaigning season, i.e. in autumn, in A.D. 43. The distribution of winter-quarters depended on numerous criteria, but comparison with the much better documented Gallic War of Caesar suggests that the main concerns were to keep an eye on recently defeated tribes and to spread the burden of the food supply more evenly. Alchester, located near the boundary of the Catuvellauni and Dobunni, at the junction of two of the most major traffic routes in the evolving road network (which probably followed in part Iron Age communication routes), and next to a hill which offered wide views, was in a prime strategic position.[69]

I have previously considered the possibility that Alchester could have been the base of the garrison left behind after Aulus Plautius received the submission of the Bodunni referred to by Cassius Dio (thought to be identical with the Dobunni). I have never claimed that this was any more than one possibility, and I equally thought it possible that a garrison could have been left elsewhere in or near the territory of the Dobunni.[70] The likelihood of the latter theory being right or wrong has been unaffected by the new evidence. As far as the former is concerned, it is worth noting that Cassius Dio states that, immediately after the garrison had been left behind, Vespasian and his brother Sabinus played a prominent role in the first river battle and that they and their soldiers managed to cross the stream (whose identification is a matter of debate) unexpectedly and to slaughter numerous enemies on its opposite bank.[71] This is an argument against the hypothesis that much of Vespasian's unit was left behind (and certainly not until after this battle), especially since Suetonius[72] informs us that he also fought under the personal command of Claudius, leaving little doubt that he and part or all of his legion were involved in the capture of Colchester. Whilst this is no ultimate proof that Alchester could not have housed the garrison mentioned by Cassius Dio,[73] it is less likely now. It seems futile to speculate any further here, and it is still possible that timbers from one of the gates of the main fortress survive to establish the season and verify the year of the foundation of the main fortress.

This is also not the place to reiterate all of the arguments for and against the two main opposing hypotheses of the place where the invasion army landed.[74] It is important, however, to bear in mind that the differences in the potential routes the invasion army could have taken equally allow for very different interpretations of the most informative passage on Vespasian's activities in Britain, Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum, Divus Vespasianus*:

> Claudio principe Narcissi gratia legatus legionis in Germaniam missus est; inde in Britanniam translatus tricies cum hoste conflixit. Duas validissimas gentes superque viginti oppida et insulam Vectem Britanniae proximam in dicionem redegit partim Auli Plauti legati consularis partim Claudi[i] ipsius ductu. Quare triumphalia ornamenta … accepit …
>
> Under the reign of Claudius and through the influence of Narcissus he was sent as a legionary legate to Germany; after his transfer from there to Britain, he fought thirty times with the

69 Sauer 2001a, 14, 40; 1998, 74.
70 Cass. Dio 60.20.2; Sauer 2001a, 39–41; 2002b, 354–5.
71 Cass. Dio 60.20.3–4.
72 Suet., *Vesp.* 4.1.
73 Cass. Dio 60.20.2.
74 See Frere and Fulford 2001 and Grainge 2002, the latter now no longer so firmly opposed to the Sussex theory (information kindly supplied via e-mail, 15 November 2002), for recent summaries of arguments in favour of a landing in Kent; see Bird 2002, Manley 2002, and Sauer 2002b, all with references to further reading, who argue in favour of an invasion on the central south coast.

> enemy. He brought two most powerful tribes, over twenty *oppida* [urban settlements] and the Isle of Wight, which is located in close proximity to Britain, under [Roman] rule, partially under the command of the consular governor, Aulus Plautius, and partially under that of Claudius himself. For this he received the *triumphalia ornamenta* …[75]

Vespasian's key involvement in the subjugation of tribes and even the capture of kings is confirmed by Tacitus.[76] It has long been assumed that one of the two tribes mentioned by Suetonius must have been the Durotriges. This hypothesis rests mainly on three arguments:[77]

> 1. Vespasian evidently fought on the south coast as he conquered the Isle of Wight.
> 2. The archaeological evidence for the storming of hillforts in Dorset seems to fit well with his conquest of more than twenty *oppida*.
> 3. The Second Augustan Legion was evidently later stationed in and responsible for South-West Britain — from the late A.D. 50s or early A.D. 60s in Exeter and from A.D. 74/75 at Caerleon (whether or not it had been based at Gloucester in between need not concern us here)[78] — and this in conjunction with its conquest of the Isle of Wight suggests that it had conquered all of the territory in between.

However, the first and third arguments are seriously weakened if we consider the possibility that Vespasian could have taken the Isle of Wight at the time of the original invasion if it had taken place on the central south coast. When Britain was forcefully re-united with the rest of the Empire in A.D. 296, the invasion army, or at least a significant part of it, landed in the immediate vicinity of the Isle of Wight, and it is even mentioned in the panegyric on Constantius I.[79] Indeed, the fact that the Isle of Wight is the only one of Vespasian's conquests in Britain specifically named by Suetonius or, indeed, any classical author suggests that its capture had some importance. This would have been the case had the invasion army landed close by and had it been taken then and is more difficult to explain had the small island been one of numerous acquisitions of similar size later on. Levick's objection that a landing near the Isle of Wight can be ruled out because of its dangers, i.e. 'the presence of the enemy on the island behind the Roman landings',[80] is difficult to accept as there is no reason to exclude the possibility that the island could have been conquered simultaneously with a stretch of mainland shore (e.g. following one of the three different landings[81]), or immediately after.[82] Thus the fact that Vespasian had conquered this

75 Suet., *Vesp.* 4.1–2; cf. Eutr. 7.19.1.

76 Tac., *Agr.* 13.3; the other literary sources for Vespasian's military activities in Britain are Joseph., *BJ* 3.4–5; Sil., *Pun.* 3.597–8; Tac., *Hist.* 3.44; Valerius Flaccus 1.7–9.

77 While the later base of the Second Augustan Legion at Exeter was only discovered much later, in essence the three arguments can already be found in Wheeler's classic excavation report on Maiden Castle: Wheeler 1943, 61–2; cf. 63–8; see also Frere 1987, 58–9; Todd 1999, 57–8; Webster 1993b, 107–10.

78 See Hassall 2000b for a summary of the different views.

79 *Pan. Lat.* 8.15.1; Casey 1994, 136–8.

80 Levick 1999, 17–19: paradoxically, she accepts Hind's (1989) theory that a vexillation had been dispatched to *Corinium* (Cirencester) early in A.D. 43 as a possibility, while being highly sceptical about the theory that the invasion army or any part of it had come to Cirencester or anywhere near it during this phase of the war. There is no evidence, as far as I am aware, to suggest that the Second Legion (or, indeed, any other Roman troops) 'captured' White Horse Hill, near Uffington in Oxfordshire, as Levick proposes.

81 Cass. Dio 60.19.4.

82 This cannot easily be compared with Tacitus' (*Ann.* 14.29–30) more detailed account of the conquest of the slightly larger island of Anglesey in A.D. 60, as Tacitus generally tends to provide more detail and as this island's capture has to be seen in the context of the outbreak of the Boudiccan rebellion at the time, not to mention the island's possible function as a religious centre.

particular island does not provide us with a certain clue as to where his legion was deployed after the fall of Colchester. There is no attempt here to deny the possibility that the Isle of Wight could have been taken some time after the fall of Colchester, but it is indeed no more than a possibility.

In the light of Suetonius' testimony that over twenty *oppida* were taken by Vespasian, it is still tempting to assume that the Second Augustan Legion conquered some of the hillforts of the Durotriges, such as Hod Hill and Maiden Castle, even if the archaeological evidence for military assaults on hillforts in the South-West does not normally allow differentiation between events of the mid-A.D. 40s and potential later armed confrontation within the first generation of Roman rule (e.g. in the wake of Boudicca's rebellion).[83] However, we should not necessarily assume that the other military commanders in Britain did not also besiege and conquer a series of *oppida* simply because they never became emperors and thus found no biographers to tell us. This is a note of caution against accepting the involvement of the Second Legion in subduing the Durotriges as a certainty. It is not an argument against it having been possibly, or even probably, involved. We have no certain positive evidence for any other legion having been deployed in the area at the time. (This is, of course, no compelling counter-argument in the light of the fact that there is no clear primary evidence as to where the Ninth[84] and Fourteenth Legions operated at the time, even if we find them later in different regions.)

Furthermore, it seems fair to argue that it may well be no coincidence that the strongest archaeological evidence for early armed resistance against the Roman invasion comes from the territory of the Durotriges and that Vespasian not only gained the *triumphalia ornamenta*, a high distinction at a time when the triumph itself was an honour reserved for the emperor,[85] but also such a strong military reputation that he was later chosen to suppress the first Jewish revolt.[86] (His appointment was, of course, partially influenced by the fact that, being of comparatively humble origins, he was not considered to be a potential pretender to the throne who could threaten Nero whilst being in charge of such a strong military force.) Of course, it has to be acknowledged that the sources that praise Vespasian's military achievement in Britain are Flavian or post-Flavian. While it is difficult to assess the reliability of authors writing under Vespasian or his sons, or those who may have used sources of this time, the specific details offered by Suetonius render, in my view, an above-average performance of Vespasian in Britain probable and this may indeed have been a decisive factor in entrusting him with crushing a particularly dangerous revolt. The sources which allege that he had fallen from Nero's favour for obvious lack of appreciation of the emperor's musical performances[87] prior to being entrusted with commanding the Roman army in the Jewish War all post-date the end of the Flavian dynasty. If true, Nero's displeasure at Vespasian's behaviour would add strength to the argument that proven abilities and humble origins rather than favouritism led to choosing a disgraced person, but the severity of the offence to Nero may, of course, have been exaggerated for similar reasons as the praise of Vespasian's military performance, i.e. to show him in a favourable light.

Whether or not the assumption is correct that Vespasian may have done more than his fair share in crushing the British resistance, there are at least copious analogies for legions operating at considerable distance from their winter-quarters, and the Durotrigan hillforts would by no

[83] Richmond 1968; Wheeler 1943; on uncertainties in chronology and historical interpretation see Woodward 2000 and Sharples 1991, 124–5.

[84] I understand that the inscription fragment from Hayling Island (cf. King and Soffe 1994, 40) appears to attest the Ninth Legion, but that it is uncertain whether or not it dates to the invasion period (information kindly supplied by Grahame Soffe, 9 January 2004).

[85] Suet., *Vesp.* 4.1–2; cf. Eichholz 1972.

[86] cf. Tac., *Agr.* 13.3; Levick 1999, 28.

[87] Suet., *Vesp.* 4.4, 14; Tac., *Ann.* 16.5; Cass. Dio 66.11.2; cf. 63.10.1[a].

means have been beyond the reach of a legion stationed in the Midlands at Alchester. Suetonius' emphasis on his capture of over twenty *oppida* adds strength to the argument, although they may well have included some in the Midlands as well as those potentially stormed near the south coast. Indeed, if we maintain that the Second Legion conquered the Durotriges (as seems likely), the location of Alchester suggests that it was not only the number of Vespasian's military engagements and their success, but also the geographical scale of his operations which earned him such military laurels. Since it is unlikely that troops stationed at Alchester would only have operated to the south of their base, and never ventured in any other direction, we may presume that their sphere of operations also extended to the north and west well beyond Alchester. It may be objected that this would have resulted in a rather dense concentration of legions in the north and a significant gap (as far as legionary deployment is concerned) in Roman defences in the south-west. Yet, short of assuming that the Ninth or Fourteenth Legion was positioned near the south coast for a few years, it is hard to see an alternative.

While the Second Legion could have been involved in the conquest of Hod Hill, Maiden Castle, and other hillforts in the area, and, on balance of probability, probably was, the question must be asked who provided the garrison for the fort on Hod Hill and other possible installations, such as at Chichester, both of which appear to be contemporary with Alchester on the basis of their dating evidence,[88] as well as the later fort at Waddon Hill and the much later fortress at Lake Farm. In the light of the above considerations, it seems to me increasingly less likely that the Second Legion would have reduced its fighting power by dispatching cohorts over such a wide territory. The popular theory that pieces of *lorica segmentata* and other weaponry found at Hod Hill and Chichester represent legionary equipment[89] can no longer be sustained, as it is equally found in forts of auxiliary size and even in provinces without a legionary garrison.[90] We have to accept that distinguishing between a legionary and an auxiliary garrison is virtually impossible even on the basis of sizeable assemblages of military equipment as long as these do not contain objects inscribed with the names of the units. It seems likely that the Second Augustan Legion in conjunction with auxiliary regiments under the overall command of Vespasian conquered the territory of the Durotriges, but that the units left behind to garrison it were mainly or exclusively auxiliaries, while most or all of the legion was kept together at its winter-quarters at Alchester. We have to bear in mind that half or almost half of the Roman army consisted of auxiliaries,[91] and it is generally accepted that the same is likely to have applied to Britain's early occupation force. Ascribing the vast majority of early military sites in Britain to legionaries thus leaves auxiliaries without shelter and protection, unless we assume that the early bases mostly had mixed garrisons, an observation also made by Hassall.[92]

Equally Norman Field's theory that Lake Farm was the original base of the Second Augustan Legion and that it and not Exeter was referred to by Ptolemy[93] cannot be correct. Dating evidence, as already pointed out,[94] strongly suggests that the fortress does not pre-date the A.D. 50s. Thus we can rule out the hypothesis that it was Vespasian's base. However, it also seems unlikely that the legion was moved from the Midlands to Dorchester or Lake Farm around A.D.

88 Sauer 2001a, 44–9 with figs 17–18.
89 e.g. Webster 1993b, 124–5; cf. Holder 1982, 12–13.
90 Maxfield 1986; Hassall 2000b, 64–5; Sauer 2001a, 22–8, notwithstanding Bishop (2002, 91, 94 no. 3), who still believes that, across the Empire, in this period virtually every well-explored military base, irrespective of its size, housed a contingent of legionaries, reiterating his long-held view that segmental armour was normally worn by legionaries only.
91 cf. Tac., *Ann.* 4.5 on A.D. 23.
92 Hassall 2000b, 64–5.
93 Field 1992, 177–82; Ptol., *Geog.* 2.3.13.
94 Sauer 2001a, 44–9 with fig. 17.

49, as suggested by Hassall,[95] or at a later date, or, indeed, that the Second Legion ever had a permanent base in Dorset. The density of military artefacts from Alchester and the fact that there appear to be three building phases in both the Alchester annexe and the main fortress (at least two of them involving the construction or significant modification of buildings) scarcely allows for a short-enough occupation of Alchester to allow for the possibility of the Second Legion being stationed at Lake before it moved to Exeter in the late A.D. 50s or early A.D. 60s. Of course, one could put forward the hypothesis that the Second Legion was replaced at Alchester by a different garrison in the A.D. 50s to allow for it being stationed at Lake Farm for a few years. Yet, as long as there is no independent evidence or even indication that the Second Legion or any part of it was ever stationed at Lake Farm or anywhere else in Dorset, beyond a highly questionable interpretation of a short passage in Suetonius, one is on safer ground when settling for an auxiliary garrison or a different legion. However, a transfer of the Second Legion to Lake in the A.D. 50s to be replaced by a different garrison at Alchester remains at least a possibility, while an occupation of Lake under Vespasian's term as legate does not.

If we still maintain that the Durotriges were quite possibly one of the two tribes conquered by Vespasian, which was the other? The location of Alchester and, much more importantly, the absence of any evidence for Roman penetration into Dumnonian territory at such an early date strongly suggests that we can exclude the Dumnonii. Salway's and Frere's view that they constituted the second tribe, even though they acknowledge that their territory was not occupied before the reign of Nero,[96] now seems very unlikely. Maybe, the theory that the part of the Dobunni, other than the one which surrendered in A.D. 43, constituted Suetonius' second tribe[97] has gained in probability in the light of Alchester's geographic location not far from Dobunnic territory. However, in the light of the above-stressed large radius at which legions could operate, it would be unwise to create any firm dogma. It is remarkable, however, to what extent the tombstone from Alchester challenges the accepted version of the course of history. Levick is one amongst many painting a picture of Vespasian and the Second Legion operating almost exclusively in or near Durotrigan territory while stating: 'How far north Vespasian's operations extended is not clear'.[98] The location of the base at Alchester far from Durotrigan territory suggests now that the events in the south were, if not a side-show, just one amongst several possible areas of operation for the future emperor and his legion.

After Anthony Birley's exhaustive examination of the officers of the Second Augustan Legion there is no need for a repetition here, but it is worth noting that, in addition to Vespasian, two more officers of this legion are known to have taken part in the Roman invasion of Britain and to have distinguished themselves during the subsequent war of conquest: the *praefectus castrorum* P. Anicius Maximus from Antioch in Pisidia (central Asia Minor)[99] and the equestrian tribune M. Stlaccius Coranus from the Rome/Ostia area.[100] They would almost certainly also have been stationed at Alchester for some time in the A.D. 40s. In addition to these the *tribunus laticlavius* L. Vettius Statura from Urvinum Mataurense in the north of the Italian region of Umbria[101] also appears to have served in the Second Augustan Legion while its base was at Alchester.

95 Hassall 2000a, 444; 2000b, 61, 63 tab. 6.10.
96 Salway 1981, 93; Frere 1987, 58–9.
97 Suet., *Vesp.* 4.1; Cass. Dio 60.20.2; Webster 1993b, 107; cf. Henderson 1988, 91.
98 Levick 1999, 18.
99 *CIL* III, 6809; Birley 1990, 8–10; Devijver 1976, A116.
100 *CIL* VI, 3539; Birley 1990, 10; Devijver 1977, S81.
101 Balland 1981, 123–9 no. 48 = *AE* 1981, 828; *CIL* XI, 6054; Birley 1990, 10; cf. 1981, 281.

THE END OF ALCHESTER'S MILITARY OCCUPATION

No coins of Nero, late Neronian brooches, or other material suggestive of a continued military occupation of the annexe into the mid- or late A.D. 60s have as yet been found. The quantity of equipment and the different phases suggest a long occupation and it is hard to imagine that the annexe was abandoned before the later A.D. 50s at the earliest. There are as yet not enough firmly stratified military deposits and finds from the main fortress to establish the end of its occupation with any degree of certainty, but it is at least safe to conclude that the main fortress would, most probably, not have been abandoned before the annexe, but either contemporaneously with the annexe or at a later date. It is interesting, however, that the material evidence for the date of the abandonment of the annexe is compatible with that for the foundation of Exeter. There can be no doubt that Exeter became the base of the Second Legion in the light the employment of the same mould for antefixes at the Exeter and Caerleon bath-houses,[102] similarities in the design of the installations (not to mention the identical place name, *Isca*),[103] and Ptolemy's location of the base of the legion.[104] The apparently similar sizes of Alchester and Exeter strongly suggest that the whole legion was transferred rather than just part. Unless Alchester was re-occupied by a different garrison, it seems likely that the main fortress and annexe at Alchester were abandoned at the same time, even if it cannot as yet be independently confirmed. The fine chronology of the available finds assemblages from neither site is sharp enough to establish with certainty whether the change of base pre- or post-dates the outbreak of Boudicca's rebellion in A.D. 60; while scholarly opinion places the foundation of the Exeter fortress before A.D. 60, mainly between A.D. 55 and 60,[105] the date range is very close to A.D. 60 and the calibration of finds assemblages in this particular period not sufficiently precise to permit any certain conclusions. The coin evidence from Exeter excludes the possibility that the legionary fortress dates back to before the mid-A.D. 50s,[106] while the absence of late Neronian coins or brooches from Alchester suggests that at least the annexe was abandoned no later than the first half of the A.D. 60s at the latest. The above-mentioned evidence for a long occupation of Alchester on the other hand is easier to reconcile with a date around or after A.D. 60 than with A.D. 55, though the current database does not allow us to establish with any degree of certainty whether the occupation lasted until a few years before or after the time of the rebellion.

During Boudicca's revolt the *praefectus castrorum* of the Second Legion, Poenius Postumus, famously refused to reinforce Suetonius Paulinus' army in the final battle against the rebels. After the defeat of Boudicca he committed suicide.[107] We can only guess whether this happened at Exeter or Alchester, or even whether the absence of the legate might potentially be explained by the move being in progress. It has been argued that the Second Legion may not have moved because it had to keep the Durotriges under control.[108] However, this is no more than a hypothesis, not necessarily an unlikely one, especially if the legion was indeed already at Exeter, but neither can we exclude a wide range of possible alternatives; there is no way we can ascertain on the meagre information we have what psychological, personal, or strategic reasons drove Poenius Postumus to take a decision he evidently came to regret later. The legion certainly would have been closer to the scene of the event if it had still been stationed in the Midlands, but in our ignorance of the prefect's motives for disobeying orders, we cannot argue that the legion's move therefore has to pre-date A.D. 60.

102 Bidwell 1979, 13; Bidwell and Boon 1976; Boon 1984, 3, 10; Henderson 1988, 100, 102 fig. 5.8.
103 Henderson 1999; 1988, 98–100.
104 Ptol., *Geog.* 2.3.13; cf. Rivet 1979, 378.
105 Henderson 1988, 91–2; Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 3.
106 Reece 1991, 38; Sauer 2001a, 45 fig. 17.
107 Tac., *Ann.* 14.37.
108 Webster 1993a, 95; 1993c, 45.

As pointed out above, the Second Legion reached Exeter in the late A.D. 50s or early A.D. 60s. This would suggest that the main fortress at Alchester was evacuated at the same time, even if, unlike for the annexe, there is as yet limited independent evidence for the date of abandonment. Of course, we cannot exclude the possibility that the main fortress was re-occupied by a different garrison. It is important to mention in this context that Christopher Howgego has recently pointed out that, of the precious metal coins minted for Vespasian in the East around the time when the Jerusalem was re-captured in A.D. 70, the findspots of only two are known anywhere in the world and both are from Oxfordshire (one a site find from Finstock, the other from a second-century hoard at Didcot). Howgego argues, persuasively in my view, that this geographic concentration, even if it involves only two gold coins, is 'most unlikely to be a mere coincidence', especially since 'the only two recorded finds of gold from Oxfordshire both contain an example'. He explained this tentatively with a military movement from Judaea to Britain in the aftermath of the Jewish Revolt.[109] This is still a strong possibility and, if so, one wonders whether this troop movement might have involved the temporary re-occupation of the fortress at Alchester or parts thereof as the only certain permanent military installation in the area (or of the postulated Neronian-Flavian fort at Dorchester-on-Thames[110]). Alternatively, Vespasian's earlier connection with the retired soldiers who had served under his command might account for this unusual distribution pattern.[111] None of the two coins is from Alchester, but gold tends to change hands infrequently and the pieces could easily have come from the same source and been passed down from generation to generation by people acquiring estate locally. While the reasons for the influx of some Vespasianic gold from the East have to remain hypothetical, the observation that the emperor depicted on them had personally been at Alchester a generation before their mintage is a near certainty.

[109] Howgego 2003; I am grateful to Dr Christopher Howgego for drawing my attention to this important discovery and discussing it with me before publication. Whether another link to Judaea may be provided by Wright 1970, 305 no. 1 from Wood Eaton is open to debate.

[110] Frere 1985, esp. 91–8, 105–6; Burnham and Wacher 1990, 117.

[111] In the light of Vespasian's likely personal knowledge of Alchester it is now also possible to consider that the two gold coins may be the remnants of some sort of imperial benefaction. Architecturally, the civilian town of Alchester seems to have had a grand start only to decline to mediocrity later. There is evidence that a monumental bathhouse and a temple built on the same axis were linked to the town by a road flanked by a wall on either side over a distance of at least 140 m. No explanation for these two parallel walls along the road has as yet been possible unless they were part of a colonnaded street. Such a street leading into a town would be without parallel in Britain (Sauer 2003b, 99–102 with figs 22–4; cf. Hurst 1999a, 155–7). However, the full analysis of the finds has to be awaited before venturing a date for these early walls. The temple traced by Patrick Erwin's geophysical survey (Erwin and Sauer 2001, 4 fig. 2, 6, 7 fig. 3) has never been excavated and the bath-house only in 1766. It is thus too early to speculate whether the grand start of the civilian town and the gold coins in Oxfordshire have anything to do with Vespasian's earlier presence. It is probably safer to assume that the theory of a troop movement from the East is more likely to account for the unusual, but rather modest, eastern architectural feature of a probable colonnaded street. There is also nothing to suggest that Alchester ever became a *municipium*, let alone a colony, or even a lower-status centre for a self-governing community. However, the location of the fortress had been chosen for strategic reasons and, being near a tribal boundary and in rather wet surroundings, it was too marginal to be a suitable place for a *civitas* capital later. Some, but not all legionary bases reached high status as civilian towns. Vespasian, who on the whole pursued a frugal financial policy, may well not have spent any money at all on his former base or, if so, not much. However, we should keep an open mind. Even if Vespasian's eastern gold coins reflect troop movements (conceivably in response to continuing armed resistance or the threat of such) rather than any benefaction, it is still a tantalizing possibility that the emperor, who after all knew the area well, could have been personally involved in the decision to deploy troops at Alchester or in its vicinity.

EPILOGUE

While the inscriptions on stone and bone are likely to survive for an indefinite period, even if not recovered, the 2003 season also yielded various thin and flat wooden objects from the ditch fill next to the annexe gate of A.D. 44, interestingly associated with what may be a wooden *stilus*. These are currently being conserved at Leicester and so far none has yielded any traces of writing. Even if they are uninscribed, it is clear that writing-tablets would still survive at Alchester thanks to the, until recently, high water table. Worryingly, in the dry summer of 2003 wooden artefacts were in several non-adjacent trenches found around 500 mm or more above the water table and the water table had decreased substantially in comparison with 2002 levels. The sapwood of the timbers recovered in 2000 and dated to A.D. 44 was 'showing distinct signs of degradation' and there were 'holes beginning to form in the sapwood suggesting that these timbers are close to losing the critical dating evidence provided by the sapwood'[112] as observed by Ian Tyers; substantial voids had formed above all of them where all wood had already disintegrated, but soil processes had not yet led to the collapse and filling with soil of any one of them. The voids reached up to 510 mm above the water table in the wet summer of 2000 and 650 mm above the highest recorded water table in summer 2003, while the (still) preserved rotting tips of the posts protruded up to 180 and 320 mm respectively above the highest recorded (2003) water level. Alchester, as an invasion-period legionary base under the temporary command of a major historical figure, with significant waterlogged deposits, is a unique site. The years, however, when it will still be possible to recover such unique organic material from a site whose wet deposits have already yielded Britain's earliest Roman tree-ring dates, the earliest evidence for the import or introduction of four plant species,[113] and are likely (as, not just Vindolanda, but several early military waterlogged sites in Britain, the Low Countries, and modern Switzerland) to contain writing-tablets, are probably numbered.

APPENDIX: THE OTHER INSCRIPTIONS

INSCRIPTION NO. 2 (FIG. 7)

D [M(?) ---]	or	D [IS MANIBVS (?) ---]
D(is) [M(anibus) *---]*	or	*D[is Manibus* *---]*

'To the souls of the departed: …'

Material: originally white oopelmicrite, a shelly oolithic limestone, finer-grained than No. 1,[114] with light yellowish brown staining and dark blackish brown stains in places.

[112] Information kindly supplied by Ian Tyers, University of Sheffield (e-mail of 19 January 2001).
[113] Information kindly supplied by Dr Mark Robinson, Oxford University Museum (pers. comm., 2001–2003).
[114] Information kindly supplied by Dr Roy Clements, University of Leicester, 19 January 2004.

FIG. 7. Fragment, probably of a second tombstone, with inscription No. 2. The visible white segment of the scale measures 100 mm.

Dimensions: part of a slab measuring 230 by 95 mm and up to 60 mm thick. Neither the backside nor the left, right or bottom edges are preserved.

This fragment is almost certainly part of another tombstone as the wide empty space to the left of the letter 'D' is best explained by this being the first letter of the formula *Dis Manibus*, whether unabbreviated or in an abbreviated form. Unlike the previous example, this epitaph was incised into a slab.

This inscription, as pointed out above, comes from the foundations of the town wall in the vicinity of the first tombstone. It thus appears that a series of stone monuments (possibly all then still extant) perished when the town wall was built. The working party responsible for the foundations north of the west gate appears to have used the remains of at least two tombstones in this small section. No part of any inscription has ever been found re-used in any medieval or modern building in the surrounding villages and towns, despite the fact that the entire town wall, except for the rubble foundation, seems to have been robbed out to re-use the stones. Therefore it may well be that smashed-up stone monuments were mainly or exclusively used in the rubble foundations, the only part of the wall left undisturbed by the stone robbers. Many more may still be there.

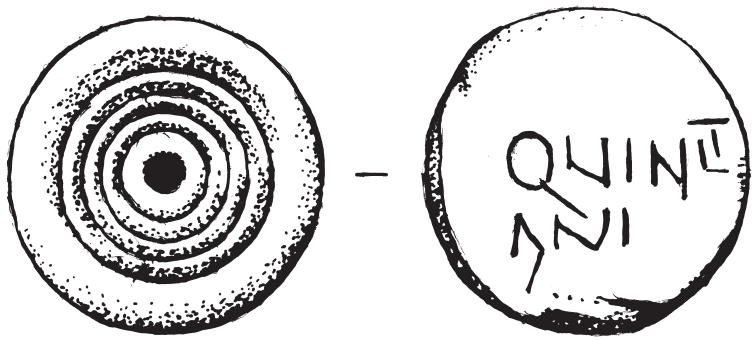

FIG. 8. The bone counter with inscription No. 3. Scale: 2:1. (*Drawn by Vanda Morton*)

INSCRIPTION NO. 3 (FIG. 8)

QVINTI
ANI

'Belonging to Quintianus'

This inscription is incised in a bone roundel of 20.5 mm diameter, with concentric ring design on the obverse.

This game piece was discovered in 2002. Since it has already been published,[115] only a short summary is offered here, though some interpretations have been revised and updated in the light of new evidence from the finds analysis. The bone counter is from Context 32.9 in Trench 32, a deposit built up over and behind the late second-century A.D. rampart. The samian from this context is predominantly of Antonine date, including one late Antonine piece, but it also includes re-deposited Flavian sherds.[116] The coarse pottery dates the context to the later third to early fourth century.[117] No distinctive re-deposited military-period artefact has as yet been recognised amongst the metal finds from the context. This suggests that Quintianus is more likely to have lost this counter in the civilian town than during the occupation of the fortress. The name Quintianus is very common in the Latin West of the Empire[118] and there is no way of deciding whether he came from abroad, was a descendent of a foreigner (such as a legionary veteran), or whether he was of purely British ancestry, but had adopted a Latin name.

115 Sauer 2003b, 102–3 with fig. 25.
116 Geoffrey Dannell, unpublished report on the samian from the 2002 season.
117 Berrington 2003 and further information kindly supplied by Nicholas Cooper, University of Leicester (January 2004).
118 Lörincz *et al.* 2002, 18; cf. *CIL* and *RIB* indices.

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School of History and Classics, University of Edinburgh
eberhard.sauer@ed.ac.uk

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