



What Happened in the Summer of A.D. 122? Hadrian on the British Frontier — Archaeology, Epigraphy and Historical Agency

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ABSTRACT

In the summer of A.D. 122, Hadrian (A.D. 117–38) visited Britain as part of his first major journey. It is broadly accepted that the construction of Hadrian's Wall was inaugurated on this occasion. Following recent advances in Upper Germany where the limes palisade is now known to have been under construction when Hadrian visited the province, this paper re-examines the various strands of evidence for the early chronology of the Wall. It is argued that work started well before A.D. 122 and that it was in fact the 'fort decision' which resulted from the imperial visit. The revised sequence offers a fresh perspective on several classic Wall problems and prepares the ground for a new understanding of unique features like the milecastles and Vallum.

Keywords: Hadrian's Wall; Hadrian; Roman frontiers; epigraphy; A.D. 122; Birdoswald; Maryport; *expeditio Britannica*

In the summer of A.D. 122, the emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117–38) visited Britain as part of his first major tour of the provinces.¹ He left Rome sometime between late April and late August A.D. 121, visiting Gaul first. The rest of the journey is preserved in the *Historia Augusta* whose *Life of Hadrian* is thought to derive, partly and indirectly, from the lost autobiography he wrote towards the end of his life. After Gaul came Germany, then Britain, South Gaul again, and finally Spain.² During the winter of A.D. 121/2 Hadrian may have remained on the northern

¹ I am especially grateful to David Breeze and Peter Hill for recent discussions which were crucial in helping me rethink some of the views presented in Graafstal 2012. Paul Bidwell, Ian Haynes, Fleur Kemmers, Lawrence Keppie, Matt Symonds and Roger Tomlin also provided useful comments or information. This is particularly true of Anthony Birley and David Breeze who both read earlier drafts. This article is the first part of a bipartite paper; a sequel will examine the place of the milecastles and Vallum in the suggested new sequence.

² SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 10.1–12.2 with A. Birley 1997, 113; Halfmann 1986, 195ff.; Graafstal 2012, 126. For Hadrian's journeys: Syme 1988 and A. Birley 2003.

frontier, experiencing the ‘German snows’ and perhaps staying in Cologne with his friend Nepos, the governor of Lower Germany.³ Nepos is believed to have accompanied Hadrian next spring, to become Britain’s new governor, in which role he appears on a diploma dated 17 July A.D. 122.⁴ The emperor’s *adventus* to Britain was commemorated on later coins, while the contemporary poet Florus admitted he ‘would not like to be Caesar, to walk among the Britons’, perhaps referring to the famously itinerant behaviour of the ‘restless’ emperor.⁵

On the eve of Hadrian’s journey, interestingly, many milestones were set up in Gaul and Upper Germany dated to A.D. 120 and 121. Most were probably dedicated by local communities in anticipation of a possible imperial visit.⁶ Britain has its own scatter of early Hadrianic milestones, the earliest dated examples from the province. They share some of the clumsy features of the Gallic series of A.D. 120/1, such as the supposed imperial title of *Pater Patriae* which Hadrian, exceptionally, took in A.D. 128 only. Two date to A.D. 119/20 and 120/1, while the third leaves the tribunician year open and is put in the dative, perhaps exposing it as a local dedication in anticipation of the emperor’s journey.⁷

During his stay in Britain, Hadrian is likely to have travelled north to personally inspect the frontier zone. The Caton milestone, interestingly, was placed on the Lancaster to Burrow-in-Lonsdale road, perhaps confirming that the emperor’s journey was expected to include a tour along the northern frontier. An exceptionally luxurious building at Vindolanda roughly dated to this period has also been associated with the visit, while one of the writing-tablets, a draft version of an appeal, actually addresses ‘your majesty’, quite possibly meaning Hadrian himself.⁸ Whatever his precise whereabouts, Hadrian probably stayed a couple of months in Britain, his visit most likely following the usual pattern of travelling ‘through one province after another, visiting the various regions and cities and inspecting all the garrisons and forts (...). He personally viewed and investigated absolutely everything, not merely the usual appurtenances of camps, such as weapons, engines, trenches, ramparts and palisades’.⁹

HADRIAN AND THE EARLY STAGES OF THE WALL: THE RECEIVED VIEW

One direct outcome of Hadrian’s visit to Britain, so our textbooks say, was the order to construct a mural barrier across the Tyne-Solway isthmus, ‘to separate the barbarians from the Romans’.¹⁰ His personal knowledge and prior experience must have been a crucial factor in the decision making that went on during the inspection journey. There is a difference from Upper Germany, however, which Hadrian knew from his days as a tribune with *legio XXII* at Mainz, back in A.D. 97–8: he had no personal knowledge of Britain, let alone of the complex geography of the Tyne-Solway isthmus. In their classic study, Breeze and Dobson certainly voiced a broadly shared feeling

³ A. Birley 1997, 113f. For Nepos’ friendship: SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 4.2, 23.4. ‘German snows’: Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 69.9.4. Halfmann 1986, 197, opts for Lyon.

⁴ *CIL* XVI, 69. See A. Birley 2005, 121.

⁵ Florus, 1.2: ‘*ambulare per Britannos*’. The poem was probably written soon after the journey: A. Birley 1997, 143. Coins: *RIC* 882, cf. 912–13.

⁶ Zahrt 1988 sees them as mere dedications. Rathmann 2003, 72f., convincingly argues for real road improvements by local authorities.

⁷ *RIB* 2244 (TRP III) from Thurmaston on Fosse Way near Leicester; 2265 (TRP V) from Llanfairfechan in Gwynedd; 2272 (uncounted TP, COS III) from Caton, Lancs., respectively. Dative case: Rathmann 2003, 72f., 120ff., but see Edwards 2008, 77 with figs 2–3.

⁸ Bowman and Thomas 1994, 344, ll. 4–5: ‘*tuam maiēs[t]atem*’. See A. Birley 1997, 135f.; 2002, 75f. (‘surely Hadrian himself’). Cf. R. Birley 2009, 101f. with fig. 56, for the ‘palatial building’.

⁹ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 69.9.1–2; cf. SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 10.6.

¹⁰ SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 11.2.

when observing that ‘Hadrian had never been to Britain and was unlikely to instigate so radical a plan without first-hand knowledge’, i.e. without seeing things for himself.¹¹

This would be in keeping with this powerful, slightly pedantic character as he emerges from our written sources. ‘Hadrian was a clever and able man, but tended to parade his talents too much, delighting in demonstrating his superiority to others.’¹² Well attested is his interest in architecture, military matters included. Opper has recently portrayed Hadrian in his role as a building patron ‘surrounded by a train of architects, engineers and other highly skilled professionals (...) initiating projects, examining plans and drawings, constantly involved, challenging, criticizing and demanding’.¹³ Whatever the truth about the fate of Apollodorus, the star architect who was allegedly executed for criticising Hadrian’s design for the Temple of Venus and Roma, the general impression from court gossip and biographical anecdote is that ‘arguing with Hadrian could be bad for your health’.¹⁴

What is also thought to have discouraged any prior work is the belief that the British garrison was somewhat incapacitated before the summer of A.D. 122 because of the transfer of *legio IX Hispana* to the Continent c. A.D. 115, part of it perhaps even earlier.¹⁵ Its replacement, *legio VI Victrix*, is generally believed to have been involved, as one of the three main workforces, in the first sector of the Stone Wall to be implemented — the three 5-mile blocks east of Portgate.¹⁶ The arrival of the Sixth may have been part of an interconnected series of legionary movements, which also involved the return of *I Adiutrix* from the East to Brigetio in Pannonia Superior and the transfer of *XXX Ulpia Victrix* from there to Xanten in Lower Germany, the former base of *VI Victrix*. With the headquarters building of *I Adiutrix* at Brigetio long thought to have been completed in A.D. 124¹⁷ and the visit of Hadrian seen as inaugurating work on the Wall, the favoured scenario always envisaged *legio VI* arriving with Nepos in the summer of A.D. 122.¹⁸ This has provided the starting-point for all modern narratives about the most iconic of Rome’s frontiers, implying that work on Hadrian’s Wall can hardly have started in earnest before the late summer of A.D. 122.¹⁹

¹¹ Breeze and Dobson 2000, 66. Cf. e.g. Hill 2006, 19; Bidwell 2009a, 34; Bidwell and Hill 2009, 37. See A. Birley 1997, 128f., for possible earlier sources of information.

¹² Goldsworthy 2009, 41.

¹³ Opper 2008, chs 3 and 4, 101ff. For Pseudo-Aurelius Victor, *Epitome De Caesaribus* 14.4–5, highlighting Hadrian’s building activity, see Stoll 1998.

¹⁴ To borrow a phrase from Poulter 2010, 131. See SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 15.10–13, 16.8–10. Apollodorus: Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 69.4.1–5.

¹⁵ See A. Birley 2005, 228f. Haalebos 2000, 472, argued that it supplied the core of the *vexillatio Britannica* that replaced *legio X Gemina* at Nijmegen after A.D. 103/4. Keppie 2000, 92ff., suggests that the unit’s final transfer was part of a ‘global reshuffling of forces’ in anticipation of the Parthian war of A.D. 114–17.

¹⁶ The classic statement is in Hooley and Breeze 1968; cf. Breeze and Dobson 2000, 66ff. and Breeze 2006, 67ff.

¹⁷ Lőrincz 1975, 347.

¹⁸ See Hassall 2000a, where A.D. 122 is the coping stone in all deployment schemes discussed.

¹⁹ The standard version, since the mid-1970s, has been Breeze and Dobson 2000, 63ff. Few have ventured to undermine the A.D. 122 threshold. Shotter 1996, 54 and 59, has Hadrian visiting Britain earlier, referring to an aureus supposedly of c. A.D. 120 showing a reclining deity tentatively identified as the river Tyne by Toynbee 1934, 139. For Stevens 1955 and 1966 and Bennett 2002 see below.

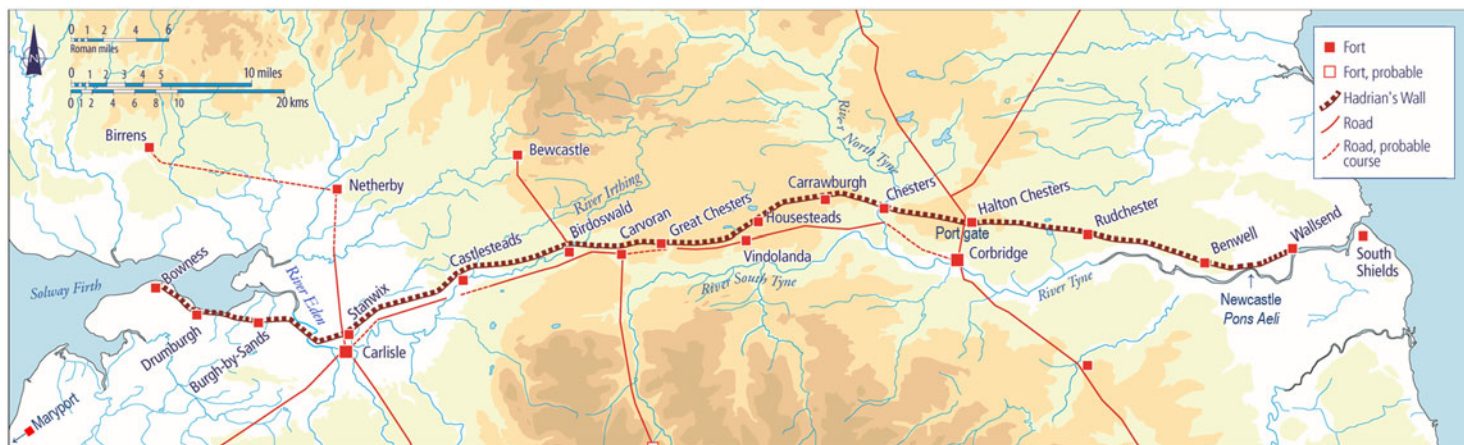


FIG. 1. Map of the Tyne-Solway isthmus showing the line of the Hadrianic frontier as well as the main roads. Most of the river and fort names used in the text are included. (Courtesy of David Breeze, with a few additions by the author)

The Wall's basic anatomy is well known (FIG. 1).²⁰ The original plan provided for a massive wall built of roughly dressed sandstone with an earth-and-rubble core, 10 ft wide and at least 12 ft high, probably topped by a wall-walk with crenelated parapet.²¹ Double-gated fortlets integrated with the Wall provided passage-points at every mile (hence 'milecastles'), with two towers ('turrets') added in between, probably for local surveillance.²² In front was a V-profiled ditch, 9 ft deep and 27/8 ft wide on average, separated from the Wall by a 20 ft-wide berm.²³ West of the river Irthing, the same basic design was adapted to building in turf and timber, with the earth rampart ('Turf Wall') 20 ft wide at its base, though the turrets were constructed in stone. Along the Cumberland Coast, a system of free-standing fortlets and towers was continued for a further 25 miles to Rise How south of Maryport. Under the original plan, the line installations were probably designed to be supported by existing forts strung along the Stanegate, including those at Corbridge, Vindolanda and Carlisle.²⁴ The milecastles were probably originally conceived as providing accommodation for the Wall personnel, the more lavish internal buildings of the early MC 48 possibly reflecting the original arrangements for operating the frontier system.²⁵

At some point, which most would place roughly halfway into the second full season at the earliest, work was dislocated by a change of plan.²⁶ This provided for forts to be placed on the Wall at regular intervals, perhaps a normative $7\frac{1}{3}$ miles, with some room for deviation.²⁷ Some like Chesters (the 'projecting' forts) were placed to straddle the Wall, others like Housesteads had their north walls coincide with it. The 'fort decision' involved suppressing substantial lengths of Wall and ditch (as at Halton Chesters, Chesters, Birdoswald), while several of the new installations replaced existing turrets (as at 27a, 36b and 49a).²⁸ More or less synchronous with this, and equally incisive, was the decision to add a second barrier, the Vallum, which provided for a flat-bottomed and steep-sided ditch, 10 ft deep and 20 ft wide at the top, with similarly profiled earth banks set back on each side, forming a 120 ft (1 *actus*) wide barrier system in its own right.²⁹ For much of its length, this earthwork was planned to run closely behind the Wall line, often carefully embracing the sites of newly planned forts, as at Benwell, Halton Chesters and Birdoswald.

It has long been understood that the planning of the Vallum was dependent on the known locations of the Wall forts.³⁰ Recently, Poulter has shown that adjacent parts of the earthwork

²⁰ See Breeze and Dobson 2000, 25ff.; Breeze 2006, 50ff. For current approaches and a research agenda: Hodgson 2009b; Symonds and Mason 2009. Historiography: Breeze 2014, with E. Birley 1961 still indispensable for the antiquarian phase.

²¹ Hill and Dobson 1992, 28ff.; Bidwell 2008a.

²² See most recently Foglia 2014, much like the German *limes*: Baatz 1976, 47; Woolliscroft 2001, 108f., 143.

²³ Staggered rows of *cippi* probably serving to hold in place an entanglement of forked branches (cf. Caesar, *Gallic War* 7.73.2–5) have been discovered at many locations between Wallsend and Rudchester: Bidwell 2005 and 2009b.

²⁴ For the pre-Hadrianic Stanegate system: Hodgson 2000. For signalling arrangements under the original plan for the Wall: Woolliscroft 2001, 58ff.

²⁵ Symonds 2005, 74ff.

²⁶ See Breeze and Dobson 2000, 76, for the classic timetable; Graafstal 2012, 129ff., for the amount of work delivered before dislocation. The evidence for initial 5-mile work stints set out from the North Tyne eastward and the Irthing westward (Graafstal 2012, 140ff.) as well as the absence in Wall miles 7–22 of modern records of Narrow Wall overriding Broad foundations/footings/first courses in the manner frequently seen between the North Tyne and Irthing go a long way to show that work in the central sector started in a later season.

²⁷ Swinbank and Spaul 1951; Breeze and Dobson 2000, 50ff.; Breeze 2017.

²⁸ The evidence for occupation at Ts 27a, 36b and MC 43 is open to different interpretations: see Hill 2006, 106; Graafstal 2012, 130 with n. 73. Crow 2007, 126f., questions the reality of the fort decision, emphasising that additional forts must always have been foreseen east of the North Tyne. However, these had probably originally been planned to the rear (see Poulter 2010, 84ff.), as in the central sector (Woolliscroft 2001, ch. 2), only to be overtaken by the fort decision.

²⁹ Two crucial recent contributions: Wilmott 2008; Breeze 2015.

³⁰ For historiography: Breeze 2014, 32ff.

were set out from the new fort sites.³¹ Moreover, it seems that both new elements, Wall forts and Vallum, were given priority over the completion of the Wall itself.³² Significantly, Housesteads was provided with rounded corners and normal corner towers, as if no Curtain Wall was going to touch the fort in the foreseeable future.³³ When work on the Wall was finally resumed, the width had been reduced to a new normative gauge of 8 ft — the ‘Narrow Wall’. Evidence for a substantial hiatus between the Broad and Narrow stages has been noticed at many points, potentially indicating an interval of several, if not many, years. Striking instances include the realignment of the Narrow Wall just south of the existing Broad foundation at Mons Fabricius and, for more than a kilometre, west of Great Chesters, not to mention the peat and silt formation as well as burnt scrub vegetation between Broad and Narrow work at Peel Gap.³⁴

This all underlines the huge impact of the fort and Vallum decisions. However, other causes for interruption apparently manifested soon after. Work on the defences of Chesters, Housesteads and Birdoswald may have started simultaneously and to a decent standard, but before long the quality of work on the gate piers dropped rather dramatically, perhaps pointing to a ‘second dislocation’.³⁵ The nature and causes of this decline in the standard of workmanship, as well as the apparent ‘hiatus formations’ that followed at Birdoswald and probably also at Chesters, deserve further study and thought.³⁶ The same applies to their possible relation with a ‘second war’ which has been suggested for the period *c.* A.D. 123/5.³⁷ All we can safely say is that two forts in the eastern sector as well as several MCs (37, 38, 42) in the central sector were delivered under the governorship of Nepos, *i.e.* before A.D. 126/7.³⁸ What is also clear is that work on the Wall continued after Nepos, including a review of the distribution of forces undertaken *c.* A.D. 130: sometime after A.D. 128 an earlier planned fort was built at Great Chesters after all, while another was added at Carrawburgh in the early A.D. 130s, both possibly heralding the completion of the Curtain Wall in those areas.³⁹

PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS

For all its familiarity, this sequence is certainly open to challenge. First, there may be chronological issues with the received date for the fort decision in *c.* A.D. 124. Two coin hoards buried in early fort contexts at Birdoswald, which close with types traditionally dated A.D. 119–21/2, some in mint condition, would seem to favour an earlier date.⁴⁰ There are also

³¹ Poulter 2009, 42ff., 46ff., 52ff., 73ff., with figs 2.5, 2.8, 2.11 and 2.17; 2010, 99ff.

³² Breeze and Dobson 2000, 76ff.; Hill 2004, 147ff.; 2006, 140ff.; Graafstal 2012, 151ff.

³³ Bennett 2002, 828; Graafstal 2012, 153.

³⁴ Mons Fabricius: Crow 1991, 55 with fig. 1. Great Chesters: Breeze 2006, 276f. Peel Gap: Crow 1991, 55. Cf. Graafstal 2012, 153. The traditional contrary piece of evidence is Vicarage Garden, Gilsland, where the core of the Broad and Narrow stages was found to be of ‘a homogeneous mass of mortared rubble’ (Simpson 1928, 385; cf. Breeze 2003, n. 23). However, what appears to be soil formation is visible under the Narrow foundation in the foreground, at the colluvial point of a local hollow: Simpson 1976, fig. 8.

³⁵ Hill 2004, 149ff.; 2006, 140ff.; Bidwell and Hill 2009, 38.

³⁶ Hiatus soils at Birdoswald: Wilmott 1997, 59, 73ff.; Wilmott *et al.* 2009, 214ff., 389 with fig. 313; Graafstal 2012, n. 248. Breeze has rightly pointed out that the 0.75 m of peat and clay formation in the Wall ditch under Chesters fort (Graafstal 2012, 132f.) may wholly or partly reflect a building hiatus at the planned fort site (*pers. comm.*).

³⁷ See Breeze 2003 and Graafstal 2012, 123f. For the alternative date of *c.* A.D. 122: A. Birley 2005, 307f.; 2014, 243ff.

³⁸ *RIB* 1340 and 1427, and 1634, 1637–8 and 1666, respectively. For the duration of Nepos’ tenure: A. Birley 2005, 125ff.

³⁹ Great Chesters: *RIB* 1736. Initially planned as a larger fort: Swinbank and Spaul 1951. Anticipated by the Vallum builders: Breeze 2015, 17, 19. For the local sequence: Hill 2004, 147f.; Heywood and Breeze 2010, 1f. Carrawburgh: *RIB* 1550 with Breeze 2015, 19f.

⁴⁰ Robertson 2000, nos 131–2, with discussion in Graafstal 2012, 155f.

potential problems at Maryport, famous for its many altars of *cohors I Hispanorum*, where the uniquely complete list of its Hadrianic commanders, if not their yearly dedications to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, would be easier to accommodate had the local garrison been established c. A.D. 122/3.⁴¹ This would, however, create friction with the wider Wall chronology as the fort seemingly overlies the spacing pattern of the Cumberland Coast system, in parallel with the Wall forts. These issues will be discussed in more detail below; for now, it suffices to say that the traditional timetable for the Wall may be under stress at these two forts.

There is a further caveat with timetables, certainly in complex projects like Hadrian's Wall, that the rate of building is over optimistically calculated, not just in Roman times.⁴² In the conditions of the northern Pennines, the available workforce may have been stretched over more, and longer, logistic lines than estimated to supply sufficient food, fodder, building materials, transport and security. Other major frontier works like the *Via nova Traiana* in Arabia or the Antonine stage of the Raetian *limes* demonstrably took five to seven years at least to build — evidence which only applies to the road and palisade respectively.⁴³ It is questionable, therefore, whether Roman authorities ever thought in terms of a three-season timetable for the Wall project, as the initial plan alone (including the Cumberland Coast) comprised some 120 km of fort-like rampart and ditch, over 300 line installations, a third of which were double-gated fortlets, and, presumably, a handful of extra forts and supporting road infrastructure. Other burdens soon followed with the additional workload of the Wall forts and Vallum. There were also unforeseen security crises, both in Britain — the putative 'second war' of the mid-A.D. 120s — and elsewhere — the Bar Kochba rebellion in Judaea (A.D. 132–6), for the suppression of which Britain may have supplied troops and officers.⁴⁴

The logistic run-up to such a major building enterprise must also be considered. If the project was conceived and initiated during Hadrian's visit, it would have taken some time before three legions and their ancillary forces could have reshuffled current deployments and commitments and freed the necessary hands for the job. A recent analysis rightly emphasises the logistic ramifications of the Wall project, notably in terms of food and fodder provisioning, an often-neglected aspect in modern studies but one that would normally have been resolved before a 5-digit workforce was transferred to and concentrated on the frontier.⁴⁵ Moreover, detailed plans would have to be drawn up, discussed and approved. Surveying and planning may be another under-estimated aspect, certainly if a tightly-knit signalling arrangement underlies the Wall's spatial design.⁴⁶ It seems unlikely that all conditions would have been met, with the plans worked out and the necessary troops transferred, supplied and encamped along the Wall line before the late summer of A.D. 122 or, more realistically, the start of the next building season — unless, of course, the plan for the Wall had been communicated to the relevant authorities well in advance of Hadrian's visit,⁴⁷ though that would undermine the traditional threshold of A.D. 122.

It would also introduce a more problematic incongruity. Without doubt, the Wall was one of the emperor's personal prestige projects. The Staffordshire Moorlands (or Ilam) Pan certainly suggests

⁴¹ Graafstal 2012, 156ff.

⁴² For different approaches see Breeze and Dobson 2000, 75ff.; Hill 2006, 120ff. with fig. 66; Hartis 2009, 276ff.

⁴³ *Via nova*: AE 1896, 135; 1897, 65, 143; 1904, 59; P Michigan 466, with Negev 1977, 646; Becker 2009, 939. Raetian *limes*: Sommer 2011, 151, 157ff., with fig. 9 (stages 6–7).

⁴⁴ See A. Birley 1997, 273f.; 2017, 60ff.

⁴⁵ Hartis 2009, 160ff., 329ff., 539ff. Cf. logistic preparation for Pius' Scottish campaign at the Corbridge *horrea* in A.D. 139 and 140: RIB 1147–8, with Hodgson 2008, 51.

⁴⁶ Signalling: Woolliscroft 2001, 58ff. Planning: Poulter 2009, 33ff.; 2010, 79ff.

⁴⁷ Perhaps implied by Bidwell and Hill 2009, 37: 'the Roman army had been operating in the area for some 40 years, and preparation time could have been short enough to allow work to begin while Hadrian was still in the province.'

that the contemporary name of the frontier barrier was *Vallum Aelium*, literally ‘Hadrian’s Wall’;⁴⁸ while at its eastern end, the original plan apparently incorporated a bridge over the river Tyne which was duly called *pons Aelius*, ‘Hadrian’s bridge’ — a rare instance of a bridge named after a person outside Rome where such structures normally honoured their builder.⁴⁹ The feat of building an 80-mile wall from coast to coast was duly canonised in imperial biography.⁵⁰ Interestingly, one of the milecastle inscriptions of *legio II Augusta* has Hadrian in the genitive case, which is a rarity: this ‘seems less likely to indicate imperial property’, the *RIB* editors commented, ‘than to be connected with the fact that the Wall was in a very specific sense “Hadrian’s work”’.⁵¹ Finally, the Jarrow monument, which may have stood close to the eastern terminus, even referred to the emperor’s ‘divine instruction’.⁵²

In 2008, a British Museum exhibition highlighted Hadrian’s role as a building patron and his close involvement in the architectural design of his private and public building projects.⁵³ In a crucial paper in 2009, Breeze highlighted the many unique elements of Hadrian’s Wall and plausibly suggested that, in the case of the Wall too, the emperor was probably deeply involved in the design of what must have seemed the ideal frontier barrier.⁵⁴ The milecastles, the Vallum and the projecting forts all stand out as radically innovative elements, verging on the bombastic. Fifty years ago, Stevens saw the Vallum as especially born ‘from an adventurous and imaginative mind, able furthermore to enforce its imagination, in fact from the mind of Hadrian himself’.⁵⁵

The radical nature of the fort and Vallum decisions forces us to contemplate a more formal problem. The Wall originated in a world of imperial *mandata*, where much lesser works needed the emperor’s formal approval.⁵⁶ In provincial settings like Britain, this was normally communicated through his legates, principally through a *mandatum* issued at the start of their governorship or specific instructions given *ad hoc*.⁵⁷ The fort and Vallum decisions clearly amounted to a radical intervention, entailing a substantial waste of invested labour and a complete revision of the original plan. It is simply unthinkable that this could have been done without imperial consent. Specific instruction given to the British governor is the very least one would expect, especially with a fresh governor like Platorius Nepos who had only arrived in the summer of A.D. 122. In the case of the Wall, however, we have the emperor himself present and inspecting the British frontier around the same time.

A compact solution has been proposed, which would allow Hadrian to take *both* decisions while in Britain, i.e. to have him issue orders for the original plan, oversee the first stages of work, and then come up with the adapted plan, perhaps after shortcomings had been recognised. Hill’s work has gone a long way towards bringing this scenario within the bounds of possibility. His 2004 analysis of the logistics and workflow of the construction of the stone Wall, with the experience of a professional stonemason, has emphasised the generally low level of workmanship which would have facilitated faster progress than is usually assumed. The thrust of his argument is that the *preserved* remains of the stone Wall could represent no more than a few months’ work.⁵⁸

⁴⁸ Tomlin and Hassall 2004, 344f.; Hodgson 2009a, 20ff.

⁴⁹ Evidence for the bridge: Bidwell and Holbrook 1989, 99ff. There is nothing to suggest that Aelius here referred to anyone other than Hadrian: Bidwell and Snape 2002, 256ff.

⁵⁰ SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 11.2.

⁵¹ *RIB* 1638 with Collingwood and Wright 1995, 520; cf. Breeze 2009, 90. But see now Keppie 2017.

⁵² *RIB* 1051a: ‘*divino pr[ae]cepto*’.

⁵³ Opper 2008, 100ff.; see n. 13 above.

⁵⁴ Breeze 2009.

⁵⁵ Stevens 1966, 40; cf. 1955, 396.

⁵⁶ See Reuter 1997.

⁵⁷ Imperial *mandata*: Millar 1977, 313ff.; 1982, 7ff.; Potter 1996. For references to *mandata* in Pliny’s correspondence with Trajan: Sherwin-White 1966, 543f., 547.

⁵⁸ Hill 2004, 146; 2006, 136f.

In 2012, the present author argued that such a compact scenario is unlikely to account for all the work apparently undertaken before the fort decision.⁵⁹ This included, from east to west: (1) rather more than the *preserved* remains between Newcastle and the North Tyne; (2) most of the Broad Wall foundation and a good number of ‘priority’ structures in the central sector; (3) a start, and probably good progress, with the Turf Wall; (4) likely a first series of installations along the Cumberland Coast; and (5) apparently the Wall ditch in many places, as evidenced in the eastern, central and western sectors at Halton Chesters, Chesters and Birdoswald, respectively. There may also be a formal stratigraphic objection at Chesters, where a 0.75 m peat-and-clay deposit had formed in the ditch prior to the building of the fort which contained occupation material, possibly related to T 27a.⁶⁰ Attention was also drawn to the time-consuming stages that necessarily preceded the first stone being laid, such as releasing and transferring the required building capacity, as well as logistic preparation in terms of food procurement, supply roads, scaffolding material and stone quarries, and last but not least, planning, surveying and developing plans in the legionary drawing-offices.⁶¹

It seems inescapable that one of the two decisions has to be removed from Hadrian’s busy schedule for the summer of A.D. 122. If he followed the usual pattern of his provincial journeys, he would have travelled widely, visiting the major administrative centres, commissioning or inaugurating public buildings, meanwhile hearing and answering more than the usual number of requests and appeals, if only because he would have been joined by his governor during part of the yearly judicial circuit. Perhaps the Llanfairfechan milestone indicates that Hadrian’s travel schedule was known, or expected, to include a tour along the ‘internal frontier’ of western Britain with its many forts and two legionary fortresses at Chester and Caerleon.⁶² All this would have required the emperor’s attention. The Wall may be our hobby horse, it may even have been Hadrian’s; but we cannot claim the emperor exclusively for our project while he was in Britain, as his presence on the northern frontier is probably best estimated in weeks rather than months.

This raises the question as to which of the two decisions is more likely to have resulted from Hadrian’s visit: the initial or the adapted plan for the Wall? The original design with its metronomic turret-milecastle-turret triplets smacks of a simple module that could have been made up anywhere, its inspiration drawn either from normal fort walls or from the circuit walls of Greek and Hellenistic cities.⁶³ On the face of it, the original design looks like a drawing-board product conceived without much knowledge of the local geography. The fort decision, however, bears all the marks of a drastic intervention in a work-in-progress, perhaps after shortcomings had been recognised. Whereas the original plan looks like a template for the ideal frontier barrier that could have been hatched anywhere, the fort and Vallum decisions suggest a degree of knowledge of the local situation. The first plan, therefore, is better understood as a model conceived far away from local reality, while the adapted plan more than likely reveals the ‘restless’ emperor’s active *presence*.

⁵⁹ Graafstal 2012, 129ff.

⁶⁰ Haverfield 1901, 86f., with fig. 5, clearly representing a substantial hiatus: Graafstal 2012, 132f., 146. However, the hiatus formation may be partly if not largely due to an interruption of work at an early stage of fort construction, with the ditch initially retained as a rubbish dump (David Breeze pers. comm.).

⁶¹ Graafstal 2012, 129, discussing Hill 2006, 76, who calculates that some 135 km(!) of scaffolding poles were needed if the attested units were to deploy about half their strength optimally in the dispersed fashion suggested by the remains of the Wall in miles 22–48.

⁶² For an overview: Burnham and Davies 2010, 50f., with fig. 2.8, referring to the grant of *civitas* status to the Silures and Demetae about this time.

⁶³ Stevens 1955, 388; Baatz 1976, 31ff.; Crow 1986, 725; 1991, 57; 2007, 129; A. Birley 1997, 133; Breeze 2009, 97. In addition, I would emphasise the possible inspiration drawn from normal fort defences, the height and crenelated parapet of the Wall as well as the milecastle gates being broadly similar to their fort equivalents.

AN ATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVE WITH SEVEN SUPPORTS

An alternative scenario deserves serious consideration. This requires a change to just one piece of the jigsaw — the project's starting-point, the 'Wall decision' — to suggest that actual work started *before* the imperial visit of A.D. 122, allowing its principal to inspect the project at an early stage. This would avoid many of the problems raised in the preceding section. Moreover, it would open the attractive possibility that the combined fort and Vallum decisions were informed by Hadrian's personal experience during his stay on the British frontier and even allow for them to have been taken while he was there in person. With the fort decision moved to the summer of A.D. 122, the classic timetable, as a mental exercise, would then push the first full season of work on the stone Wall to A.D. 121, with the previous year available for troop transfers and the logistic preparation of infrastructure, supplies, equipment and scaffolding.

The suggestion that the project may have started before A.D. 122 is not new. Stevens suggested a start 'in mid-season of A.D. 120', based largely on his own intricate reconstruction of the Wall's building order based on legionary signature-structures and work-stints, with two legions starting work on the stone Wall in mid-A.D. 120 and *VI Victrix* coming over only in A.D. 122.⁶⁴ His reconstruction of the building order was soon replaced by the classic 1968 paper by Hooley and Breeze, the evidential basis for which was questioned by Bennett, who argued for rather longer work-stints than the well-known 5-mile blocks.⁶⁵ Like Stevens, Bennett also suggested that the Vallum may have been the outcome of Hadrian's A.D. 122 visit, 'as a substitute for the Wall itself'.⁶⁶ The latter suggestion seems unlikely and may have negated the reception of Bennett's alternative scheme.⁶⁷ In his 1997 biography of Hadrian, Birley, finally, assumed that work on the Wall had started before the imperial visit. A detailed examination of the matter was beyond the scope of his biography, however, while his reference work on the government of Roman Britain merely stated that the early scenario 'deserves serious consideration'.⁶⁸

While there are no formal chronological objections against such a scenario, can we produce arguments in support of an earlier start? Perhaps we can, since on closer inspection, there are several strands of circumstantial evidence that tally with an early timetable. These will be discussed briefly below.

1. Time for logistic preparation

In the Roman imperial context, large-scale building projects and military campaigns (other than immediate responses to security crises) often took one or two years of logistic preparation. Troops needed to be freed from (or replaced in) current commitments and to be transferred, supplies of food and equipment would have to be organised beforehand, infrastructural improvements might be required, building materials were not always available on site, etc. A fitting example comes from the very eve of Hadrian's stay in Britain. On his way, he passed

⁶⁴ Stevens 1966, 39. Crucially, it is now clear that all three milecastle types had been constructed to Broad gauge initially: see Symonds 2009a, 46, referring to Wilmott 2009a, 159ff.

⁶⁵ Hooley and Breeze 1968. Bennett 2002, 827f., argued that the Newcastle–North Tyne and North Tyne–Irthing sectors were 'assigned as a complete building block to two quite separate commands'. However, the same combinations of building 'signatures' occur in both sectors, while the eastern sector has produced the classic triple 5-mile blocks in Wall miles 7–22.

⁶⁶ Bennett 2002, 829; cf. 828 ('it may not have been intended to complete the curtain').

⁶⁷ See Graafstal 2012, 153ff.

⁶⁸ A. Birley 2005, 118; cf. 1997, 128. The present writer was unaware that Eric Birley, too, had played with this idea in his speech given at Heidelberg in May 1986 when receiving his honorary doctorate (1987, 10). I thank Anthony Birley for this reference.

through the Rhine delta, where he granted either the *ius nundinarum* or full municipal status to the *civitas* capital of the Cananefates, Forum Hadriani (Voorburg-NL). The large-scale building campaign on the *limes* road in the Rhine delta in the A.D. 120s is now also generally seen as an outcome of Hadrian's visit. It is worth noting, however, that most of the oak trees (which had to be procured from forests some 150 km away) were felled a good *two* years after the emperor issued his order for the road repairs.⁶⁹ Trajan, likewise, took two full seasons to prepare his first Dacian campaign, famously repairing the crucial Iron Gate tow-path and canal in A.D. 99–100.⁷⁰ Logistic preparation for the invasion of Britain in A.D. 43 and the annexation of Thrace c. A.D. 45/6 can be shown to have taken two years at least in both cases.⁷¹

Imperial visits also had to be planned well in advance. At Oxyrhynchus, preparations for Hadrian's expected visit to Egypt in the summer of A.D. 130 were in hand at least eight months before the event.⁷² The 'palatial building' at Vindolanda, likewise, was surely commissioned well in advance. The milestone series in Gaul and Britain go a long way to show that Hadrian's journey to the north-western provinces had been planned, and communicated to local authorities, two years or so before his burdensome visit. If Rathmann is right that the stones relate to real roadworks, the implication is that by the end of A.D. 119 or so the planned imperial visit was public knowledge in the circles that mattered.⁷³

2. The Marköbel dendrodates: A.D. 119/20

In Upper Germany, Hadrian almost certainly inspected the palisade that had recently been commissioned and was soon to mark several hundred kilometres of the frontier. Like the building of Hadrian's Wall, this was an enormous undertaking, the timber consumption of which has been estimated at 700 oak trees per kilometre.⁷⁴ All this heavy material had to be felled, transported, split, cut to the required length and provided with slits to receive cross-timbers. The construction details provided by the *Historia Augusta* have been strikingly confirmed by archaeology, including the cross-beams.⁷⁵ Hadrian apparently liked what he saw, given the fact that this massive 'wall of timber' was rolled out along the full length of the Taunus, Wetterau and Odenwald *limites*. Like the marvel of Hadrian's Wall, the German palisade duly took its place in official history, possibly through the medium of Hadrian's autobiography.

Spectacular new evidence has come from limited excavations at Marköbel on the eastern *Wetteraulimes* in 2002/3, where two trenches, 30 m apart, produced well-preserved timbers, made of split tree trunks up to 50 cm in diameter. Dendrochronological samples from both trenches produced felling dates between the winter of A.D. 119 and the spring of A.D. 120.⁷⁶ This would imply that the Upper German palisade had been officially commissioned by the end of A.D. 119 at the very latest, if not a little earlier to allow enough time for the necessary logistic preparations.

⁶⁹ Autumn/winter A.D. 124/5: Visser 2015. A similar interval is suggested by an earlier round of major roadworks and oak felling (in the winter of A.D. 99/100) which almost certainly issued from Trajan's temporary governorship of Lower Germany in early A.D. 98; see Graafstal 2002, 7f.; Hessing 1999.

⁷⁰ Tow path: Šašel and Šašel 1963, nos 55–63. Canal: Šašel 1973. Harbour basin at Aquae: Petrović 1991.

⁷¹ Graafstal in prep.

⁷² Van Groningen 1957; A. Birley 1997, 222.

⁷³ Rathmann 2003, 72f.

⁷⁴ Thiel 2008, 85.

⁷⁵ SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 12.6: '*stipitibus magnis in modum muralis saepis funditus iactis atque conexis*'. For the carefully worked slits: Thiel 2005, fig. 139.

⁷⁶ Schallmayer 2005, 802.

3. The transfer and participation of *legio VI Victrix*

One cornerstone of the Wall sequence as currently understood holds that: (a) the three 5-mile blocks of the Newcastle–Portgate sector belong in the first full work season; (b) one such block was assigned to each of the three British legions; (c) *legio VI Victrix* only arrived in Britain from Lower Germany in A.D. 122, along with the new governor Platorius Nepos. However, the implied syllogism is vulnerable at several points. First, work may have begun in the west, with the Turf Wall potentially commencing in an earlier season.⁷⁷ Second, while the structural evidence of three workforces (or perhaps more precisely: *planning* units) progressing their 5-mile allotments in slightly different ways is strong and largely consistent,⁷⁸ we cannot take for granted that this must indicate the work of three different *legions*.⁷⁹ Since the differences lie in the details of execution, we may ask whether the legions' institutional independence and separate chains of command are necessary to explain them,⁸⁰ as legionary vexillations were perfectly capable of working side by side.⁸¹ More seriously, we should note that the epigraphic evidence of the Sixth, compared with the Second and Twentieth, is vanishingly slight in the eastern sector.⁸² In this connection, it is also worth recalling that we do not know when *IX Hispana* finally left Britain — it could be as late as *c.* A.D. 120.⁸³

Even if *legio VI* is our preferred partner in the initial workforce on the stone Wall, its transfer in A.D. 122 is by no means certain. Pollard and Berry give the familiar scenario: 'In A.D. 122, Hadrian went to Britain taking with him the governor of Lower Germany, Aulus Platorius Nepos (. . .) and the Sixth Legion.'⁸⁴ For all the apparent economy of a newly promoted governor taking one of his legions with him, such combined transfers are unusual, quite apart from the practicalities involved. House moves of entire legions with all their dependents were complex logistic operations that required careful preparation, including the completion of, or replacement in, current commitments. Also, with most legionary bases firmly established by the early Trajanic period, such house moves usually came in simultaneous, sometimes multiple, swaps.

One such cascade happened somewhere between A.D. 118 and 122, when the troops that had been sent to the East — first to participate in Trajan's Parthian War (A.D. 113–17) and then to quell the rebellions that broke out across the East after his last campaign had ended in catastrophe — finally returned to their bases.⁸⁵ This included the return of *legio I Adiutrix* to Brigetio in Upper Pannonia, most likely forcing *XXX Ulpia Victrix* to move to Xanten, with *VI Victrix*, it might be concluded, now abandoning Xanten for Britain.⁸⁶ If this was a coherent

⁷⁷ See Graafstal 2012, 124f., 136ff.; cf. Shotter 1996, 66f.

⁷⁸ The classic paper is Hooley and Breeze 1968, with Moss 1969 for the complete set of evidence. For confirmation: Hunneysett 1980 (setting-out lines for milecastles) and Breeze and Hill 2013, 106ff. (foundation types). For historiography: Breeze 2014, 43ff. For the North Tyne as the point of departure for the first 5-mile blocks: Graafstal 2012, 140ff.

⁷⁹ For the criticism of Bennett 2002 see above n. 65.

⁸⁰ See the caveat of Mann 1990, 292, on door positions and wall widths of turrets.

⁸¹ See *RIB* 852 for joint work on the fort at Maryport by vexillations of *II Augusta* and *XX Valeria Victrix*. Cf. *RIB* 1430. Note that the distribution of centurial stones of *II* and *XX* shows little correspondence with the 5-mile blocks east of the North Tyne: Hooley and Breeze 1968, fig. 2.

⁸² Stevens 1966, 90ff. In Stevens' intricate reconstruction the Sixth joined the workforce 'in the second full season' only (39). The only stone that mentions *LEG VI*, *RIB* 1438, does not seem to come from the crucial miles 7–22; cf. Wright's commentary.

⁸³ Keppie 2000, 92ff. For speculation that *IX Hispana* may have been replaced by *VI Victrix* in the earliest stage of the Wall project: Frere 1987, 123.

⁸⁴ Pollard and Berry 2012, 94.

⁸⁵ We do not know when the situation had sufficiently stabilised for all the troops to be able to return to their provinces; cf. the long tail of the Bar Kochba rebellion which is now known to have dragged on for four years: Eck 2007, 50.

⁸⁶ See Lörincz 2000, 155; Reuter 2012, 9ff.; Schmitz 2008, 160ff., respectively.

chain reaction, it might have been interrupted by a temporary, or partial, stationing of *legio XXX* at Nijmegen.⁸⁷ Moreover, despite a century of debate, the date of the return of *I Adiutrix* and of the transfer of *XXX Ulpia Victrix* still floats somewhere between c. A.D. 118/19 and 122.⁸⁸ The later date long derived support from a building inscription in the new headquarters at Brigetio which used to be dated to A.D. 124; Lörincz, however, later reneged on this by suggesting it could be as early as A.D. 119/20.⁸⁹

The effects of a house move of c. 5,000 men with all their dependents might drag on for some time. Such operations might be phased, with building vexillations being advanced; a case in point is provided by *IX Hispana*, part of which was based at Nijmegen at the beginning of the second century, perhaps forming the core of the *vexillatio Britannica* attested on brick stamps, with the rest of the unit probably following later. It cannot be ruled out that the transfer of *legio VI* to Britain was similarly phased, with a first vexillation conceivably arriving in response to the British security crisis of A.D. 117–19.⁹⁰ Equally, if the Sixth was ‘handpicked for the particular job of frontier construction’,⁹¹ designated cohorts may have been detached and despatched to their assignment separate from, and even in advance of, the rest of the legion.

A potential clue may be provided by the career inscription of M. Pontius Laelianus Larcius Sabinus, ‘who came over with *legio VI* from Germany to Britain’ as *tribunus laticlavus*.⁹² If he held his suffect-consulship of A.D. 145 *suo anno* or close to it (i.e. about the age of 42), his service in the Sixth (assuming 18 as the normal minimal age for a *laticlavus*) is unlikely to date before A.D. 121.⁹³ However, for all the apparent stability in Antonine career patterns, we only have the approximate ages for c. 5 per cent of the consuls and, to quote Hopkins, ‘those whose ages we know are unlikely to form an unbiased sample’.⁹⁴ In periods where more data are available some slightly delayed consulships are recorded.⁹⁵ Thus the best we can say is that, normally speaking, any move of the main body of *legio VI* from Lower Germany to Britain should not pre-date c. A.D. 121 if Laelianus is concerned.⁹⁶ It remains possible, however, that vexillations were transferred earlier, either to fight or build, or that the Sixth was not even part of the Wall’s initial workforce. All that can be concluded for certain is that *legio VI* is recorded in work at one of the Wall forts under Platorius Nepos (A.D. 122–6/7).⁹⁷

⁸⁷ Strobel 1988, 452f.; Haalebos 2000, 474, partly based on unique brick stamps of *XXX* found there, but see Schmitz 2008, 161, who sees them as evidence of vexillations from Xanten based at Nijmegen, or working at the nearby Holdeurn brickworks, possibly long after c. A.D. 120.

⁸⁸ For a recent overview: Reuter 2012, 10ff.

⁸⁹ Lörincz 1975, 347, nuanced in 2000, 155.

⁹⁰ The seriousness of the troubles alluded to by SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 5.2 (‘The Britons could not be kept under Roman control’) may be underlined by the appointment of Pompeius Falco as the next governor, probably in A.D. 118 and possibly by Hadrian personally (A. Birley 2005, 117f.). *RIC* 577, referring to victory in Britain, was not issued before A.D. 119.

⁹¹ Shotton 1996, 59.

⁹² *CIL* VI, 1497+1549 = *ILS* 1094+1100 = *CIL* VI, 41146: ‘*trib(uno) mil(itum) leg(ionis) VI Victr(icis), cum qua ex Germ(ania) in Brittan(iam) transit*’.

⁹³ For his career see Alföldy’s commentary on *CIL* VI, 41146; Pflaum 1967, 144ff.; *PIR*² P 806. Consulship in A.D. 145: Holder 2006, 810.

⁹⁴ For the basic dataset: Morris 1964, 324ff. Some 22 per cent are over 42 (p. 331), not all of them *homines novi*. Hopkins 1983, 146, n. 35, rightly underlines that most of Morris’s ages have been *calculated*, based on the assumption that the lower curule magistracies were held at the minimum legal ages.

⁹⁵ Morris 1964, 334, for a significant Hadrianic cluster. In Laelianus’ case, however, his early favour (he was Hadrian’s *candidatus* as *tribunus plebis*) and later prominence seem to offer little ground for delay.

⁹⁶ A complication for the year A.D. 122 could be that Laelianus’ inscription, while being unusually digressive on the transfer of *legio VI*, fails to mention either the imperial journey or the *expeditio Britannica* which some would place in or on the eve of A.D. 122: see below n. 152.

⁹⁷ *RIB* 1427 from Halton Chesters. cf. 1428 for likely co-operation of *II Augusta*.

4. The Jarrow inscription: an echo of the Wall decision?

One of the most remarkable, and historically important, documents of Roman Britain is surely the unusual narrative inscription (*RIB* 1051a–b) that partly survives in two panels discovered in Jarrow church in 1782 (FIG. 2). Once part of a monument, likely some kind of *tropaeum*, they may have stood close to the original eastern terminus of the Wall, perhaps at *pons Aeli*.⁹⁸ Enough survives to show that the memorial highlighted some divinely inspired action ([*div*]ino *pr*[*aecepto*?]), as well as an impressive feat delivered by the British provincial army, apparently from coast to coast (*utrumque O[ceani litus or finem]*), following the scattering (*diffusus*) of enemies.⁹⁹

Several aspects of *RIB* 1051 seem to have negated its confident use by Wall scholars, not least the unique textual elements and the stark differences in lettering between the panels. Eric Birley pointed to ‘manifest affinities’ with early third-century inscriptions, obviously referring to the lavish use of ligatures in Panel 1051b. According to him, the monument commemorated the Wall’s reconstruction by Septimius Severus, mentioned in the *Historia Augusta*, but ‘referring back to Hadrian as its original builder’.¹⁰⁰ This remains possible, though Tomlin has observed that the second panel was ‘obviously cut by a different mason’.¹⁰¹ It may be noted that the dating element proposed by the *RIB* editors at the bottom of Panel 1051a would imply that this was the end of this inscription.¹⁰² Also notable is the decreasing size of the lines in both panels, as if the second inscription copied the format of the first so that it could be placed next to it.¹⁰³ One possible solution would be to envisage two panels of different dates taken from a monument restored in the early third century upon completion of the Severan Wall, with Panel b possibly referring to the latter work.

That said, there seems to be little formal objection to a Hadrianic date for Panel a, though the question remains whether Panel b *must* be much later.¹⁰⁴ Particularly problematic in *RIB* 1051a is the proposed dating element. The superscript ^o read by Richmond and Wright at the start of line 5, apart from having few parallels and being difficult to make out today, is *a priori* suspect as it sits in a secondarily worked margin.¹⁰⁵ The following S was rather solidly drawn by Wright in 1942, though it takes a very sympathetic eye to distinguish it on the photograph published in 1943.¹⁰⁶ Whatever, the reading [CO]SII is problematic either way: if it pertained to Hadrian himself, its

⁹⁸ Bidwell 2015, 9ff., has recently suggested that the branch wall at Wallsend may have ended in a monumental arched mole, pointing to the *opus quadratum* blocks with clamp sockets, typical of Roman bridges, from Building D at Jarrow. However, the bridge at Newcastle seems a more obvious source for this material and, by implication, the inscription fragments. A few extra kilometres of downstream shipping would have made little difference.

⁹⁹ For its reconstruction: Richmond and Wright 1943. I agree that *utrumque*, ‘in a descriptive context applicable to Britain, can only be part of some such phrase as [*inter*] *utrumque o[ceani litus]*’ (p. 99). Cf. SHA, *Life of Severus* 18.1: ‘*utrimque ad finem oceani*’, in the context of Severus’ rebuilding of the Wall. For a fuller discussion: Graafstal 2012, 133ff.

¹⁰⁰ E. Birley 1961, 159, who also pointed to the parallel in SHA, *Life of Severus* 18.1. The *sub cura*-formula of Panel b is otherwise first attested in A.D. 139/40 (*RIB* 1147–8).

¹⁰¹ In Collingwood and Wright 1995, 778. In an assessment report (2011), Peter Hill has noted that Panel a is c. 40 mm thicker than Panel b, while the latter is slightly coarser, none of which, he stresses, necessarily points to a difference in date.

¹⁰² The same would be true if some of the groups of closely spaced vertical strokes in the lines 5–6 should be numbers, conceivably indicating army units or lengths of work. However, Roger Tomlin has noted that ‘the stone-cutter has been emphatic in his vertical strokes elsewhere’ (pers. comm.).

¹⁰³ In his assessment report, Hill has pointed to the ‘remarkable peculiarity in that line 1 of *a* is the same height as line 1 of *b*’, *sc.* 75 mm, the following lines decreasing stepwise to 40/5 mm (*a*) and 55mm (*b*) respectively.

¹⁰⁴ Note Tomlin’s caveat in Collingwood and Wright 1995, 778, who points to a close Hadrianic parallel for the ligatures from Benwell (*RIB* 1340); cf. the early tombstone from Great Chesters, *RIB* 1743.

¹⁰⁵ Roger Tomlin reminded me that it would have been usual for the superscript O to be tucked inside the horns of the C.

¹⁰⁶ Richmond and Wright 1943, pl. III.



FIG. 2. The two surviving panels of the Jarrow inscription, RIB 1051a (left) and b (right). (Reproduced from Bruce 1875, nos 539 and 538, respectively; these woodcuts preserve details later lost due to progressive powdering and flaking, notably the crucial word NECESSITATE in RIB 1051a)

separation from his title in line 2 would be highly unusual; if it was part of a self-contained consular date involving a second tenure, the syntax is wrong.¹⁰⁷

When it comes to dating, the clincher lies precisely in the three expressions that make *RIB* 1051a so remarkable. Richmond and Wright argued ‘with virtual certainty’ for [*divorum*] *omnium fil[ius]* as the only possible reading in the apparent opening line.¹⁰⁸ Seeing that the *filius*-formula normally carried the name of the ruling emperor’s deified predecessor, Fishwick considered *divorum omnium* (‘of all deified Emperors’) ‘surely the only possible restoration’.¹⁰⁹ In the next line, *necessitate* seems equally unavoidable. Two independent woodcuts, one for the catalogue of the Newcastle Antiquaries (1857), the other for Bruce’s *Lapidarium Septentrionale* (1875), documented most of the letters of this crucial word without recognising it (FIG. 2a).¹¹⁰ In the next line, Richmond and Wright’s restoration of [*div*]ino *pr[ae]cepto*] remains difficult to improve upon, given the surviving letters, the remaining space and the preceding lofty language of divine filiation and necessity.¹¹¹

A plausible context for this unusual language is provided by Hadrian’s precarious first years in power.¹¹² From his succession on 11 August A.D. 117 to his *adventus* in Rome on 9 July A.D. 118, the new emperor had been involved in political and military crisis management. Trajan’s last campaign in Parthia had ended in near-catastrophe, unleashing a chain of revolts, including an all-out uprising of the Jewish diaspora in Cyrenaica, Egypt and Cyprus, rebellion in Dacia and major trouble in Britain. Perhaps more significant, Hadrian was facing a serious legitimacy crisis. Although there had been clear signs of Trajan’s favour, not least Hadrian’s designation as *consul ordinarius* for A.D. 118, the *optimus princeps* had failed to make proper arrangements for his succession and on several occasions had asked his trusted friends for possible candidates. Upon Trajan’s death, Hadrian, the governor of Syria, had been hailed as emperor by the troops under his command following news of an improvised deathbed adoption. Four consulars were soon executed on the orders of the praetorian prefect Attianus, Hadrian’s former guardian. While the new emperor claimed innocence, his relationship with the Senate was irreparably soured. The abandonment of Trajan’s recent conquests in Mesopotamia and east of the river Olt in Dacia fuelled rumours of jealousy and only added to the PR challenge Hadrian faced during his first year in Rome.

Hadrian’s coinage of A.D. 117–19 saw an unprecedented investment in promoting his adoption and investiture by *divus Traianus*, consistently communicating a message of dynastic continuity and divine foresight. The *Providentia deorum* reverse type had been used in this context earlier, but Hadrian’s early issues included a unique version depicting the emperor in civilian dress about to receive a sceptre held by an eagle descending from heaven.¹¹³ From the autumn of A.D. 117 to late in A.D. 118, many legends included Nerva as Hadrian’s grandfather by

¹⁰⁷ There would be no shortage of candidates in the 120s, as Lawrence Keppie reminded me: in A.D. 120, 121, 125, 128, 129 one or both of the eponymous consuls held a second term. However, the syntax would have to be: [name in ablative] [name in ablative] COS, with the two strokes coming after one (or both) of the two names.

¹⁰⁸ Richmond and Wright 1943, 107, commenting upon Huebner’s unlikely reading of D for the final letter (*CIL* VII, 498): ‘since no word related to the stem *fid-* is applicable to an honorary imperial title, *fil[ius]* remains the only acceptable restoration of the fragment.’ Cf. p. 96 for the original raised border above line 1.

¹⁰⁹ Fishwick 1987–2005, I.2, 313, n. 32. A collective *aedes divorum* existed in Rome by A.D. 145: *ILS* 5038. Cf. the *flamen divorum omnium* attested at Firmum Picenum (*CIL* IX, 5357, 5362–3, 5365) and the *templum divorum* in Caere attested in A.D. 113 (*CIL* XI, 3614/4347 = *ILS* 5918a).

¹¹⁰ Bruce 1857, no. 94; 1875, no. 539, reproduced in Anon. 1887, no. 1. Huebner in *CIL* VII, 498b boldly reconstructed NECESSITATE. This part of the inscription appears to have steadily deteriorated since the mid-nineteenth century due to flaking and powdering. However, Richmond and Wright 1943, 101, insisted that ‘inspection with a strong sidelight leaves no doubt that these letters (...) still exist on the stone’.

¹¹¹ Richmond and Wright 1943, 112f.

¹¹² A. Birley 1997, 77ff.

¹¹³ Noreña 2011, 96ff., and Vojvoda 2015, 55ff., who rightly stresses the unique character of *RIC* 589.

adoption, signalling a deliberate policy of emphasising the emperor's divine ancestry.¹¹⁴ A fresh opportunity arose in December A.D. 119, with the death and swift deification of Matidia, Trajan's niece and, more importantly, Hadrian's mother-in-law. Henceforth, Hadrian 'was the son of a god and (...) married to the daughter of a *diva*'.¹¹⁵ Fishwick has argued that the following years probably saw a systematic promotion of the cult of the collective *divi*.¹¹⁶ The new theme of Hadrian's multiple divine parentage is reflected in a group of dedications to Divus Nerva, Divus Traianus and Diva Matidia at Pergamum dated between A.D. 119 and 122,¹¹⁷ and we can probably hear it resonate in the Jarrow inscription.

The emphasis on 'necessity' and 'divine precept' is also best understood in the context of Hadrian's first years in power. What was 'necessary' is implied by the monument itself, which obviously related to the building of the Wall, and apparently qualified by a past participle in the *genitivus absolutus* for which [*conser*]-*vati* ('preserved', meaning the Empire within its present limits, or something similar) remains the most likely restoration.¹¹⁸ Such careful justification in terms of necessity and divine injunction is reminiscent of the controversy caused by Hadrian's abandonment of the recent conquests in Mesopotamia and Dacia which he justified by referring to secret injunctions by the Divine Trajan.¹¹⁹ We now know that, in A.D. 119 or perhaps in the year before, substantial frontier works had been ordered for Upper Germany which may have seemed similarly restrictive. Whatever its precise date, the Jarrow inscription likely echoes phrases of official communication which accompanied Hadrian's new frontier 'policy' of c. A.D. 118/19 as well as the recent theme of Hadrian's multiple divine parentage.¹²⁰

5. Showpieces for imperial inspection?

In a scenario where work on the Wall started well before Hadrian's visit in A.D. 122, we might expect that at least one or two sample sections or structures were completed for imperial approval.¹²¹ Obvious places to look for evidence might be the eastern and western end-points of the stone Wall. In the east, the Tyne bridge at Newcastle is a strong candidate. As bridges have always taken time to construct, there would have been sound reasons to schedule them early in the overall planning of a complex infrastructural project like Hadrian's Wall. It is clear that all four main river-crossings were determined at an early stage, while work on the bridges over the North Tyne and Irthing probably commenced early in the building sequence.¹²² The same may be true of the Tyne bridge at Newcastle. As the Wall approaches what is traditionally seen as its original eastern terminus,¹²³ it descends from its preferred position on

¹¹⁴ Mattingly 1936, civ f., cxix. Cf. Jennings 2010, 65.

¹¹⁵ Jennings 2010, 72. As *omnium* implies a multiple and 'new Emperors normally discontinued honours for previous *divi* unrelated to them' (Jennings 2010, 71), the death of Matidia seems to be implied by the Jarrow inscription.

¹¹⁶ Fishwick 1987–2005, 308ff., esp. 313ff.; III.1, 185f., argues for the inclusion of the collective *divi* in the ruler cult of the western provinces under Hadrian, his first major journey likely serving as a crucial vehicle.

¹¹⁷ *Bulletin Épigraphique* 1958, 336, no. 496, with Fishwick 1987–2005, I.2, 313 with n. 31.

¹¹⁸ Richmond and Wright 1943, 112ff.

¹¹⁹ SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 9.1–2.

¹²⁰ Both elements seem pointless in the context of a Severan monument referring back to Hadrian, as Eric Birley suggested: Graafstal 2012, 135. A. Birley 1997, 132f., sees *RIB* 1051 as an authentic document entirely, probably taken from a speech by Hadrian. David Breeze reminded me that the emperor had his *Ab epistulis* Suetonius with him in A.D. 122: SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 11.3, with Syme 1981, 107ff.

¹²¹ For a similar suggestion: A. Birley 1997, 133.

¹²² Poulter 2009, 84, with Bidwell 2008a, 135ff. For the archaeological evidence: Bidwell and Holbrook 1989, 12f. (Chesters), 56f. (Willowford). For the suggestion of these two valleys taking priority in the building programme: Graafstal 2012, 145ff., 150f.

¹²³ For an alternative view Hill 2001 with the reply by Bidwell 2003.

the north crest of the Tyne valley apparently aiming for the northern bridgehead, the easternmost leg containing the early Broad-Wall MC 4.

Precisely when a first building vexillation of *legio VI* arrived may be relevant to the twin altars put up by this legion and found in the river Tyne at the site of the bridge.¹²⁴ Dedicated to Neptune and Oceanus, they have been thought to mirror the dedications made by Alexander after reaching the river Indus.¹²⁵ The inference might be that some significant act had taken place at this site, later commemorated by the altars, and that the bridge may have been under construction in A.D. 122. However, it has been noted that the placing of the dedication on the altars' capitals is a distinctly late trait,¹²⁶ while similar combined dedications to Neptune and Oceanus, representing river and sea respectively, are known from Vechten (NL), a major hub in the Rhine delta which, like Newcastle, lay at the head of a river stretch where the tidal cycle would have increasingly affected river transport.¹²⁷

This does not deny the early claims of *pons Aelius*, the bridge that, uniquely, honoured its imperial principal as if this were Rome. It seems inherently likely that its construction started well in advance of the imperial visit, perhaps as part of a cleverly staged package of display sections. In this connection, two *opus quadratum* blocks with clamp sockets typical of bridges from Building D at Jarrow merit attention.¹²⁸ Bidwell has recently suggested that, together with the more famous inscription slabs, they may have been robbed from a (hypothetical) arched mole projecting into the Tyne as part of the branch wall at Wallsend, a few kilometres upstream from Jarrow.¹²⁹ However, the bridge at Newcastle would seem a more obvious source for the blocks and, if we follow Bidwell's suggestion, the same could be true for *RIB* 1051.

In the west, the bridge over the Irthing at Willowford was among the first works started, perhaps as part of a larger display section. It has been observed that the installations in the adjoining Wall mile 48 all show signs of being early prototypes. Turrets 48a and b both have north walls of the same width as their side and south walls, an apparent start-up mistake repeated nowhere else along the stone Wall. They also possessed wing walls of sufficient length to allow construction to full height in advance of the adjoining curtains.¹³⁰ Similar wing walls occur at MC 48.¹³¹ In a crucial paper, Symonds has argued that the large double barrack blocks in MC 48, as well as 47, are likely to reflect accommodation arrangements under the original plan for the Wall, i.e. before the fort decision changed the whole operational concept.¹³²

This might indicate that, in Wall miles 47–8, a string of structures was built in the earliest stages of the Broad Wall phase and quite likely completed by the time the project was dislocated by the fort decision. The excavation of MC 48 produced evidence of unusual luxury features like stone stairs to the rampart, verandas fronting the barracks and even window-glass and roof-tiles. This suggests that 'these internal buildings came early in the building sequence, before such provisions were considered to be an unnecessarily costly extravagance'.¹³³ At Turrets 48a–b, there are also signs of unusual expense on workmanship. 'Several stones with a bevelled edge

¹²⁴ *RIB* 1319–20.

¹²⁵ Arrian, *Indica* 18.11. See A. Birley 1997, 130f.; cf. 2005, 121.

¹²⁶ Bidwell and Holbrook 1989, 101, referring to Kewley 1973. But cf. Bidwell and Snape 2002, 260, pointing out that the dies of the altars were occupied by sculptures which may have caused the dedications to be placed on the capitals.

¹²⁷ *CIL* XIII, 8810 ('*dis patriis et praesidibus huius luci Oceanique et Reno*') and 8811 ('*Neptuno Oceano et Rhen*'). For their combined cult see Caplan 1976.

¹²⁸ Cramp 2005, 223, fig. 16.56.

¹²⁹ Bidwell 2015, 9ff.

¹³⁰ Graafstal 2012, 130, 150. Required length of wing walls: Hill and Dobson 1992, 39; Hill 2006, 105.

¹³¹ West side: Richmond 1929, 314 with fig. 3. The north-east corner was rebuilt in conjunction with the Narrow Wall: Gibson and Simpson 1911, 405, with Symonds 2005, 70f.

¹³² Symonds 2005, 73ff.

¹³³ Symonds 2005, 74.

were found close to the inside walls of the turret [48a]; it was suggested that they had served as a cornice. Flagstones on edge in the masonry debris at this turret and its neighbour [48b] were taken to indicate the former existence of a flagged upper room.' Exceptionally, T 48b also produced a piece of roofing tile.¹³⁴ Finally, neither pain nor expense were spared on the Wall ditch in the Gilsland area, where a width of c. 15 m (50 ft) in several places in Wall miles 46–8 compares with an average 8.5 m (27/8 ft) elsewhere.¹³⁵

An early date for the structures at the western end of the stone Wall may find support in an inscription (*RIB* 1852) found at Chapel House, 275 m west of MC 47, though generally thought to have been robbed from it. On the received chronology, this early milecastle would have been completed under Platorius Nepos (A.D. 122–6/7), yet the inscription lacks the obligatory mention of his care in contrast to many others.¹³⁶ Perhaps more significantly, while all other Hadrianic building inscriptions from the Wall, including those from forts, use the short title *IMP CAES TRAIANUS HADRIANUS*,¹³⁷ *RIB* 1852 gives Hadrian's full filiation, rather in the style of 'grandiose public inscriptions'.¹³⁸ This is odd, as this is a relatively simple inscription of basic workmanship. The likelihood of the complete title *divi Traiani filius divi Nervae nepos* ending up on a modest building inscription like *RIB* 1852 would seem far greater in the early years of Hadrian when his official communication, not least his coinage, was communicating the emperor's double divine pedigree. In short, the Chapel House inscription was probably cut before Nepos, not after.

Interestingly, Wall miles 46–8 were ideally placed as a sample section for imperial inspection. First, there was a fort in the area at Carvoran, providing accommodation, the closest existing major installation to the Wall line. Carvoran was also well serviced by the Maiden Way, one of the few approaches from the south. Second, the area would allow close comparison with the adjoining Turf Wall, the construction of which was well underway at Birdoswald, if not finished, at the moment of dislocation.¹³⁹ Third, in Wall miles 46–7 the Stanegate, the only road then in existence across the isthmus, ran close behind the frontier works, with MC 48 apparently placed at the road's northernmost kink. Perhaps significantly, this installation 'lies at the east end of the only mile on the line of the Wall where both milecastles, both turrets and virtually the whole of the Wall is visible'.¹⁴⁰ There were few better stages for an imperial visit and inspection.

In this context, the Victory relief found on Rose Hill, a few hundred metres north of the Wall not far from MC 48, merits close attention. It must have belonged to a monument of quite substantial proportions, seeing that the imagery on the surviving slab (1.1 m wide) presupposes a pendant plus a central text panel, suggesting a total width of 3 m or more. The scene's bucolic style has been taken to indicate a broadly Hadrianic–Antonine date, with the curious domed structure in the background obviously paralleling Arthur's O'on, a similarly shaped shrine that once stood just north of the Antonine Wall, near Falkirk.¹⁴¹ A Hadrianic date for the Rose Hill monument may be implied by its location. Initially, the stone Wall had ended in the Gilsland area, though the place lost this distinction once the adjoining Turf Wall sector was rebuilt in stone in the later Hadrianic period.¹⁴² If the findspot is not too far removed from the

¹³⁴ Breeze 2006, 288f. For the possible positions of the bevelled stones: Hill 1997, 36, 40.

¹³⁵ Breeze 2006, 284.

¹³⁶ *RIB* 1340, 1427, 1637, 1638, 1666. Cf. Bennett 2002, 830, for Nepos' insistence. David Breeze reminded me that the absence of *P(ater) P(atriciae)*, applicable from A.D. 128, may support an earlier rather than later date for *RIB* 1852.

¹³⁷ *RIB* 851 (Maryport), 1340 (Benwell), 1427 (Halton Chesters), 1637, 1638 (MC 38), 1666 (MC 42), 1736 (Great Chesters), 1808 (Carvoran).

¹³⁸ Rightly noted by Bennett 2002, 828, who suggests that it may have come from Carvoran.

¹³⁹ Wilmott 1997, 42, 45ff.

¹⁴⁰ Today, that is: Breeze 2006, 285.

¹⁴¹ See Coulston and Phillips 1988, 105f., with a fine discussion of Arthur's O'on as a possible Victory shrine.

¹⁴² The first five miles west of the Irthing, that is. For a similar suggestion: Coulston and Phillips 1988, 106.

monument's original position, its location was well chosen, occupying the last commanding plateau before the Wall descended the slopes of the Irthing valley, in apparent accordance with Roman conventions for the placement of *tropaea*.¹⁴³ With the Stanegate road almost touching the Wall at the very point where it crosses the Rose Hill ridge, it is not difficult to imagine Hadrian inspecting this sector on his journey. One strong possibility is that the Rose Hill monument was erected to commemorate precisely this imperial visit.

6. Constrained chronologies

(a) *Birdoswald and the expeditio Britannica*

One problem with the received Wall chronology is that it may place considerable strain on the accepted dating sequence at two forts, Birdoswald and Maryport. At the former, there is little doubt that the Turf Wall and ditch, including T 49a, had already been constructed when the fort was established.¹⁴⁴ In 1930 and 1949, two early Hadrianic denarius hoards were found in contexts associated with the earliest phase of the fort.¹⁴⁵ Their composition is similar to that found at Thorngrafton near Vindolanda in 1837, all three showing a significant proportion of Republican denarii.¹⁴⁶ On the Continent, such coins largely went out of circulation under Trajan because of their higher silver content. In Britain, they apparently survived only marginally longer, so their strong presence in our three hoards should support a date rather earlier than later under Hadrian.¹⁴⁷ His four coins in the Thorngrafton hoard apparently pre-date A.D. 128, based on the absence of the title *Pater Patriae*. Those of Birdoswald, two of them in mint condition, are types originally dated A.D. 119–21/2 in *RIC*, but later extended to A.D. 119–24/5 in *BMC*.¹⁴⁸ Context and composition of all three deposits suggest a single hoard horizon post-dating the fort decision and pre-dating Hadrian's new coinage of A.D. 125.¹⁴⁹

It is tempting to suggest a relation with the reconstructed 'second war' of c. A.D. 123/5.¹⁵⁰ It would also seem the best chronological niche for the *expeditio Britannica* known from two Italian inscriptions honouring former participants,¹⁵¹ though earlier options have been proposed, synchronising the expedition with continued warfare in c. A.D. 119/20, or even more economically with Hadrian's journey of A.D. 122.¹⁵² While it is true that *expeditio* was normally used for campaigns in which the emperor personally took part, certainly in cases where a geographical name is attached to the term,¹⁵³ several exceptions are known from the time of Trajan to Pius, with the officer in question 'being sent' on the expedition by the

¹⁴³ cf. Servius, *Aeneid*. 11.6: '*in colle quia tropaea non figebantur nisi in eminentioribus locis*' ('on a hill because trophies were only positioned in eminent places'). The place also happens to be the watershed of the isthmus: Breeze 2006, 284.

¹⁴⁴ Linear works: Haverfield 1899, 347ff. T 49a was discovered beneath the fort in 1945: Anon. 1946, 274.

¹⁴⁵ Richmond 1931, 124; 1954, 56. The first, contained in a pot, had been 'pushed in the floor' of a building in the southernmost strip of the fort. The second, a bronze wrist-purse, came from the base of the earth rampart that backed up the stone fort-wall north of the east gate. For the findspots: Wilmott 1997, fig. 7.

¹⁴⁶ Robertson 2000, nos 131, 132 and 137.

¹⁴⁷ For the disappearance of Republican denarii in the A.D. 120s see Duncan-Jones 1994, 196 with fig. 14.3–4.

¹⁴⁸ Mattingly and Sydenham 1926, 315, 320ff. Mattingly 1936, cxv f., still argued for a virtual 'absence of coinage' in A.D. 122–5.

¹⁴⁹ For a similar conclusion: Bennett 1990, 350.

¹⁵⁰ Breeze 2003; Graafstal 2012, 123f.

¹⁵¹ *CIL* XI, 5632, 5829 = *ILS* 2735, 2726. See most recently Breeze *et al.* 2012 and A. Birley 2014, 242ff., with full historiography.

¹⁵² For the former: Jarrett 1976a, probably influencing Dobson 1978, 236. For the latter: A. Birley 1997, 123, 141; 2005, 118, 307ff.; 2014, 242ff.

¹⁵³ Syme 1988, 166, for a lapidary statement. For a comprehensive study: Rosenberger 1992.

emperor.¹⁵⁴ Pius was certainly not in Africa when he ‘sent’ S. Flavius Quietus, *primus pilus* of *legio XX*, ‘on the Mauretanian expedition’,¹⁵⁵ though he probably pretended to be personally co-ordinating the campaign from Rome, ‘like the helmsman at the tiller of a ship of war’, to borrow Fronto’s metaphor.¹⁵⁶ Hadrian, likewise, could be understood to have participated in the *expeditio Iudaica* in the sense that he had personally organised the military response to the Bar Kochba revolt late in A.D. 132 while still in the East, perhaps even returning briefly to the Levant to assess the situation, before the war of suppression started in earnest, led by Iulius Severus, Britain’s former governor.¹⁵⁷ Fifty years later, the *expeditio III Germanica* ought to equate with Commodus’ planned third *profectio*, and have led to his taking of the title Germanicus Maximus in A.D. 182, though in fact the emperor did not leave Italy after his return to Rome in October A.D. 180.¹⁵⁸ In short, subtle expansions in the use of *expeditio* appear to have crept in, with the emperor sometimes only notionally leading the campaign as its initial organiser, co-ordinating ‘helmsman’, or whatever role or place seemed sufficiently proximate to the undertaking to justify the term.¹⁵⁹

There are several incongruities with the *expeditio Britannica* happening in A.D. 122. As discussed earlier, no mention is made of this honorific exploit in the career inscription of Pontius Laelianus despite its coverage of his transfer to Britain with *legio VI* on the eve, or the occasion, of the imperial visit.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, *expeditiones* were always active fighting campaigns, an aspect underlined by the 3,000-strong reinforcement the British expedition brought in from Spain and Upper Germany.¹⁶¹ There is also nothing to suggest that Hadrian’s visit of A.D. 122 was anything other than a stop-over on an extended inspection journey, while the troubles that had broken out in Britain five years earlier had probably long been suppressed.¹⁶²

Renewed trouble as a *result* of Hadrian’s visit is an altogether different matter. In a follow-up to this paper it will be argued that the most direct outcome of ‘122’ was the radical closing of the Tyne-Solway isthmus with the Vallum, possibly by the end of A.D. 123. This would have exacerbated feelings of discontent about a barrier system which not only overrode settled landscapes but also radically separated communities on both sides.¹⁶³ Several strands of evidence would tally with warfare in *c.* A.D. 123/4. According to several authorities, the *cursus* of Pontius Sabinus, who served as centurion in *XXII Primigenia* (Upper Germany), *XIII Gemina* (Dacia) and, as *primus pilus*, in *III Augusta* (Numidia) between the Parthian war of

¹⁵⁴ Like Maenius Agrippa: ‘*electo a divo Hadriano et misso in expeditionem Britannicam*’ (CIL XI, 5632 = ILS 2735).

¹⁵⁵ AE 1960, 28: ‘*misso cum exer(citu) in exp(editionem) Maur(etanicam)*’. Elsewhere, the provincial name in the genitive is used to distinguish Pius’ *expeditiones* to Caesariensis and Tingitana: e.g. CIL III, 5211, 15205.1; XVI, 99; AE 1998, 1116; 2006, 1213. For the accusative of direction, again with *missus*: ILS 9491, with Trajan similarly absent.

¹⁵⁶ *Panegyrici Latini* 8.14.2, referring to the Scottish campaign of A.D. 140/2. For Pius’ pretension of ‘control by correspondence’ see Millar 1982, 12.

¹⁵⁷ CIL VI, 3505, with Eck *et al.* 2010, 198. For the flexibility of forms cf. AE 1929, 167 (*expeditio Iudaeae*) with Pucci Ben-Zeev 2000, esp. n. 1. For the transfer of Severus in early A.D. 133: A. Birley 2014, 243, 253.

¹⁵⁸ SHA, *Life of Commodus* 12.7f. On CIL V, 2155 = ILS 1574, I follow Dietz 1994, 9ff., on A.D. 182 and would point to the ensuing investment in the Pannonian *limes* in A.D. 183–5 (Kovács 2008, 126ff.). But see A. Birley 2014, 249f., for a scenario involving Commodus.

¹⁵⁹ What seems inextricably intertwined with the discrepant uses of *expeditio* is the assumption ‘that all major wars (...) are implicitly held to require the presence of the – or an – emperor’ (Millar 1982, 13).

¹⁶⁰ See above n. 96.

¹⁶¹ A point rightly made by Frere 2000, 25.

¹⁶² The seriation of Mattingly 1936, cxx, would place the British victory issue RIC 577 in or shortly after A.D. 119.

¹⁶³ Note that the Vallum spoke much clearer language about the frontier’s purpose than the Wall with its lavish provision of gateways.

A.D. 114–17 and the British expedition, rather favours a date towards the mid-A.D. 120s.¹⁶⁴ In A.D. 123, Hadrian ordered a levy in Spain,¹⁶⁵ and it is logical to infer that this is compensation for the 1,000 men transferred from that province to Britain as part of the expedition. Perhaps his recent presence in Britain and his organisation of a military response from Spain in the following year, not unlike that in Judaea in late A.D. 132, were sufficient to justify using the term *expeditio*.¹⁶⁶ A security crisis in A.D. 123 leading to major campaigning in c. A.D. 124 would provide a more normal career path for Pontius Sabinus as well as a perfect context for the Birdoswald-Thorngraston coin horizon. It has also been suggested that an Alexandrian victory issue of A.D. 125 may reflect events in Britain.¹⁶⁷ With few other victories being reported at this time, and the wide ‘news scope’ of the Alexandrian mint acknowledged in principle,¹⁶⁸ this idea may not be so far-fetched.

It should be clear that this chronology may place considerable stress on the traditional start date for the Wall project. Whatever the evidence for a smaller-sized timber installation at Birdoswald,¹⁶⁹ the sequence on the southern spur strongly suggests that the fort’s accommodation requirements and size were only properly considered, or marked out, after the Vallum had been constructed locally.¹⁷⁰ The priority of the Vallum over the fort, at least in terms of planning, is supported by Poulter’s recent work.¹⁷¹ If the traditional scheme is followed, with the fort and Vallum decisions occurring roughly halfway into the second work season at the earliest,¹⁷² the sequence at Birdoswald could become critical:

- Wall decision, traditionally in summer A.D. 122
- Time for troop transfers, logistic preparation, surveying and planning
- First full season in A.D. 123 focusing on eastern sector and Turf Wall
- Fort and Vallum decision, not before mid-season A.D. 124
- Vallum planned and constructed locally
- Fort defences completed(?) and first internal accommodation built
- Birdoswald hoards buried, likely in the context of troubles and ‘second war’ of A.D. 123/5

Theoretically, it could all fit — provided we read everything in one way — but to raise just one possible objection: if the Birdoswald-Thorngraston hoarding horizon more likely dates to the early rather than the closing stages of the troubles of A.D. 123/5, this would seriously undermine the A.D. 122 foundation.

¹⁶⁴ *CIL* XI, 5829. Cf. Pflaum 1960–1, nos 118 and 120 (E. Birley); Devijver 1977, M5 and P89; Maxfield 1981, 196; Breeze *et al.* 2012, 21 (‘not before 124’). For a different view: Jarrett 1976a, 145ff.

¹⁶⁵ A. Birley 1997, 147f.

¹⁶⁶ This would not be much different from Hadrian’s possible role in the *expeditio Iudaica*. For another instance of notional imperial presence: A. Birley 2014, 249f.

¹⁶⁷ Casey 1987, 69f., plausibly assuming a single emission period extending over the two Alexandrian years A.D. 124/5 and 125/6, ending 29 August. If so, the year would be A.D. 125.

¹⁶⁸ See Halfmann 1986, 195, and A. Birley 2014, 248, for an issue likely referring to Hadrian’s journey in A.D. 121/2. The successes of A.D. 123 against the Mauri and the Parthians cannot, I think, explain the Alexandrian issue of (mid?)-A.D. 125.

¹⁶⁹ The evidence is thin: Wilmott 1997, 42ff.; Wilmott *et al.* 2009, 206, 213.

¹⁷⁰ I suppose that at least one continuous fort ditch must have been provided from the start. This may have been largely obliterated by the bundle of recuttings of the inner fort ditch: Wilmott *et al.* 2009, 259, 264 with fig. 346. I suggest the primary backfilling of the Vallum at the fort’s south-west corner may signal, and have made room for, the construction of this early fort ditch.

¹⁷¹ Poulter 2009, 76. At Rudchester, similarly, the course of the Vallum suggests that the earthwork was under construction locally at the moment the exact size of the fort was determined: Bowden and Blood 1991, 30.

¹⁷² Breeze and Dobson 2000, 76. See above n. 26.

(b) Maryport, Maenius Agrippa and all the rest

Another fort site under potential stress is Maryport. The coastal extension of the Hadrianic frontier continued its metronomic triplet pattern for another 25 miles, replicating the Turf Wall's combination of turf-and-timber fortlets and stone towers.¹⁷³ The spacing norm of $\frac{1}{3}$ Roman mile (c. 490 m) appears to have been observed with equal rigor to Hadrian's Wall, placing some installations in obviously disfunctional positions.¹⁷⁴ That the Cumberland Coast system was also conceived as an integral part of the Hadrianic frontier may be reflected in the fact that its highest ranking garrison and strongest mobile striking force, the *ala Petriana milliaria* at Carlisle/Stanwix, lay close to the centre of the combined system.¹⁷⁵ There is also a coin of A.D. 119–c. 121 in near-mint condition, from the foundation of Tower 13a, to support the basic synchronicity of the coastal system with the rest.¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, the rigorous spacing does not tie in with the forts at Beckfoot and Maryport, which were seemingly implanted upon the original design, paralleling the Wall forts, by approximately taking the positions of Towers 14b and 23b.¹⁷⁷ Maryport, especially, sits on one of the highest points along the Cumberland Coast (55 m), a 'visual watershed' securing direct signal links with a maximum number of line installations, comparable with the elevated positions of sites like Benwell and Housesteads, probably also chosen with a view to visual connectivity within their sectors.¹⁷⁸

If Maryport was implanted on the original chain of coastal installations, its traditional foundation date, c. A.D. 122, is potentially problematic. The date is based on the unique series of altars, reused as post pads for a large timber building in the sub-Roman period, which have been rediscovered on several occasions, most notably in a single harvest in 1870. Most were dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, with the addition in a few cases of the Imperial *numen* (Table 1). As a rule, they were dedicated by the fort commander on behalf of his unit, the name of which might be skipped on reiteration. The roughly formulaic nature of the texts, the iterative pattern implied by the series of Agrippa, Priscus and Maximus, and the apparent provenance of the altars from a single repository, most likely a temple precinct, all confirm the widely accepted view that they represent official dedications, the most likely occasion being the yearly *nuncupatio votorum* of 3 January, when a new corporate vow was made, and the previous one paid, for the prosperity of the emperor and the welfare of the Empire.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ Recent surveys: Breeze 2004; 2006, 373ff.; Symonds 2009b.

¹⁷⁴ Bellhouse 1989, 2f., albeit largely based on aggregate distances. For MF 21 (Swarthy Hill) as an example of suboptimal placement: Woolliscroft 2001, 90, but see Symonds 2009b, 57f. For signalling requirements as a possible determinant: Woolliscroft 1994.

¹⁷⁵ Breeze 1991, 3. Cf. the careful distribution of *alae* on the German frontier: Kemkes and Scheuerbrandt 1997, 16f, with figs 3–4. The late Roman *Notitia Dignitatum* still registered the coastal installations as part of the Wall system (*per lineam Valli*).

¹⁷⁶ Jarrett in Bellhouse 1954, 49f. (*BMC* 1192). Cf. the 'fresh' dupondius *RIC* 605 from the foundation of T 52a: Simpson and Richmond 1934, 151. The end date of c. A.D. 121 for both coins is based on the seriation of Mattingly and Sydenham 1926, 314ff., and Mattingly 1936, cxv ff., esp. cxx.

¹⁷⁷ See Wilson 1997b, 17ff.; 2004, 21. Bellhouse 1970, 42 with fig. 6, argued that the system was set out from Maryport's corner towers (= T 23b and 24a, in his system), but the discovery of a tower, in 1981, at the site of his expected MF 26 (Bellhouse 1984, 54) upset the symmetry. On the other side, MF 23 has turned up further west than Bellhouse predicted (Jones and Woolliscroft 2001, 131, fig. 82). This would place T 23b close to the south-west corner of Maryport — a happier solution than the escape suggested by Bellhouse 1989, 56 with fig. 13. Cf. Daniels 1990, 403ff. with fig. 1.

¹⁷⁸ Quotation: Woolliscroft 2001, 90. For the impact of the fort decision: idem, 74ff. Cf. Breeze 2004, 80, for the suggestion that Old Carlisle and Papcastle may initially have been planned as 'response centres' for the Cumberland Coast. For a possible signal-tower at Raise Howe, Aldoth: Esmonde Cleary 1993, 286.

¹⁷⁹ For the series' cyclicity: Breeze 1997, 68ff. For the *nuncupatio* ceremony: Pliny, *Letters* 10.35, 100–1. The individual oath taken on 1 January was 'a completely different ceremony' (Waldock 2002, 113). For the alternative of Hadrian's *dies imperii* (11 August) see below.

TABLE 1. THE COMMANDERS OF *COHORS I HISPANORUM*, THE GARRISON OF MARYPORT BETWEEN c. A.D. 122/3 AND 139/40, ORDERED BY THEIR DIFFERENT RANKS (Where the unit or rank is inferred a reference to the notes is included)

<i>RIB</i> / reference	Commander	Rank	Unit	Dedication
812	C. Cornelius Peregrinus	<i>Tribunus</i>	Not named ¹⁸⁹	four deities
817	C. Caballius Priscus	<i>Tribunus</i>	<i>coh I Hispanorum</i>	IOM
818	C. Caballius Priscus	<i>Tribunus</i>	Not named	IOM
819	C. Caballius Priscus	<i>Tribunus</i>	Not named	IOM
820	C. Caballius Priscus	<i>Tribunus</i>	Not named	IOM
823	M. Maenius Agrippa	<i>Tribunus</i>	<i>coh I Hispanorum</i>	IOM
824	M. Maenius Agrippa	<i>Tribunus</i>	Not named	IOM + Num
825	M. Maenius Agrippa	<i>Tribunus</i>	Not named	IOM + Num
826	M. Maenius Agrippa	<i>Tribunus</i>	Not named	IOM
816	L. Antistius Lupus Verianus	<i>Praefectus</i>	<i>coh I Hispanorum</i>	IOM
821	P. Cornelius Ur[...]	<i>Praefectus</i>	<i>coh [...]</i> eq ¹⁹⁴	IOM
822	Helstrius Novellus	<i>Praefectus</i>	<i>coh I Hispanorum</i>	IOM
827	L. Cammius Maximus	<i>Praefectus</i>	<i>coh I Hispanorum</i>	IOM
828	L. Cammius Maximus	<i>Praefectus</i>	<i>coh I Hispanorum</i>	IOM
829	L. Cammius Maximus	<i>Praefectus</i>	<i>coh I Hispanorum</i>	IOM
814	M. Censorius Cornelianus	<i>Praepositus</i> ? ¹⁸⁵	<i>coh I Hispanorum</i>	Iupiter + Aug
815	Not named (vacancy?)	n.a.	<i>coh I Hispanorum</i>	IOM + Num
836	Name lost	Rank lost	Name lost ¹⁸⁰	IOM + Num
Tomlin 2012, 384	Name lost	Rank lost	<i>coh I Hispanorum</i>	IOM (?)

The collection is dominated by the dedications of *cohors I Hispanorum*, Maryport's first garrison, which may thereby have established a local, or followed a regimental, tradition. After the 2012 re-excavations we now have a staggering 17 or more such altars placed by the cohort — and quite a few commanders to accommodate.¹⁸⁰ So how long did *I Hispanorum* stay at Maryport? None of the altars include the prestigious title *Aelia* which the unit probably earned in the Scottish campaign of A.D. 140–2. It was replaced by *cohors I Delmatarum*, securely attested by only one altar.¹⁸¹ This unit may have marked its arrival by some work, perhaps at the regimental sanctuary, commemorated by a sumptuous dedication slab found alongside the altars.¹⁸² The change of garrison probably happened sometime in A.D. 139, or perhaps early A. D. 140, when preparations for the Scottish campaign may still have been ongoing.¹⁸³

What can we conclude from the altars? Despite the attraction of a simple count-back starting in c. A.D. 139, which would push the first dedication towards A.D. 123, a serious caveat exists, as some altars may have been placed on different occasions, perhaps including Hadrian's *dies imperii* (11 August), for which the combined dedications to IOM and *numen Augusti* may provide evidence.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, a yearly cycle would mean that several commanders held office

¹⁸⁰ *RIB* 836 has lost most of its text, but it was found close to *RIB* 820 as part of the 1870 cache, while 'the ornament indicates clearly that it is attributable to *I Hispanorum*' (Jarrett and Stephens 1987, 62; cf. Jarrett 1976b, 12 with fig. 4). The remaining text suggests a combined dedication to Jupiter and the *numen Augusti*, like 824–5. The same argument supports the inclusion of *RIB* 815, found close to 816–17. It fails to name a commander, perhaps pointing to a vacancy (Davies 1977, 9).

¹⁸¹ *RIB* 831, cf. 833.

¹⁸² *RIB* 832. As this inscription gives Pius' name in much abbreviated form, the omission of the title *P(ater) P(atriciae)*, which he only took in January A.D. 139, may be of less relevance.

¹⁸³ See *RIB* 1147–8, dated A.D. 139 and 140, from the Corbridge granaries. For further discussion: Jarrett and Stephens 1987, 62; Holder 1998, 258ff.; Frere 2000, 26; Breeze 2006, 400.

¹⁸⁴ Breeze *et al.* 2012, 23f. Incidental occasions, like the promotions and transfers suggested by Jarrett 1976b, 22, seem less likely for the standardised IOM dedications.

for a much shorter period than is considered usual.¹⁸⁵ Hence it is safer to work with the broadly accepted average of 3–4 years.¹⁸⁶ Incidentally, the cycles of Priscus and Maximus,¹⁸⁷ in particular, offer support for a norm that also obtained for other posts in the career structure of the Roman Empire, like provincial governorships.

Interestingly, the title of the commanders changed from tribune to prefect, probably pointing to a reduction of *cohors I Hispanorum* from milliary to quingenary size.¹⁸⁸ By implication the tribune Cornelius Peregrinus may join the list of the unit's Hadrianic commanders.¹⁸⁹ Three tribunes for the A.D. 120s would tally with the already mentioned review of the Wall garrison c. A.D. 130.¹⁹⁰ This would also bring Maenius Agrippa to Maryport, as one of the earliest commanders, a man who was 'chosen by the late emperor Hadrian and sent on the British expedition'.¹⁹¹ Given the evidence discussed in the preceding section for disassociating the *expeditio* from Hadrian's journey, in favour of A.D. 123 as the year in which trouble started and the military response to it was organised, this would mean that Agrippa served in Britain in c. A.D. 124–7, his assignment to the *expeditio* taking the form of the command of *cohors I Hispanorum*.¹⁹² Agrippa's prestigious hosting of the emperor, likely at his hometown of Camerinum in Picenum, may have followed shortly after his British posting, when Hadrian visited the area in A.D. 127.¹⁹³

With potentially seven, or even eight,¹⁹⁴ commanders to accommodate prior to A.D. 139/40, the obvious solution would be to have one of the tribunes, Peregrinus or Priscus, start the series in A.D. 122 or 123.¹⁹⁵ This would allow for an interim, like Cornelianus, and one or two shorter cycles at the start and/or end of the Hispanics' stay at Maryport. Whatever the details, the strong inference is that normal career patterns are better respected with a foundation in c. A.D. 122 than two or three years later. If Maryport was implanted on the original string of coastal installations, paralleling the Wall forts, this would imply that the decision to add and attach forts to the frontier was made around the time Hadrian visited.

¹⁸⁵ Although *prae[fec]tus* in *RIB* 814 fits the available space better, it cannot be excluded that Cornelianus, centurion of Jerusalem's *legio VI Ferrata*, was acting commander (*praepositus*), perhaps having accompanied the Hispanics' detachment from the war in Iudaea. For discussion: A. Birley 2017, 65 with n. 41.

¹⁸⁶ cf. Webster 1985, 113; Le Bohec 1994, 41; Hassall 2000b, 335; Southern 2006, 129. For a well-known example, Flavius Cerialis of Vindolanda: A. Birley 2002, 65. The average usually works well for equestrian careers for which independent dating evidence is available, like *CIL* VI, 31856 = *ILS* 1327 for L. Iulius Vehilius Gratus Iulianus: Kłodziński 2010, 5ff.

¹⁸⁷ *RIB* 817–20 and 827–9.

¹⁸⁸ See Davies 1977, 8; Jarrett and Stephens 1987; Breeze *et al* 2012, 24. A reduction is supported by the traces of an earlier larger installation found in 2005 extending immediately south-west of the visible fort: see Graafstal 2012, n. 10 and 259.

¹⁸⁹ For a second-century date: Davies 1977, 9f. All the known later garrisons of Maryport were commanded by *praefecti* (cf. *RIB* 834, probably third century). The provenance from the fort (Jarrett and Stephens 1987, 63) and the omission of the name of the unit imply that Peregrinus was the resident commander — not some passing officer. The emphasis on Peregrinus' Mauretanian *origo* is very unusual. I wonder whether this extends to the stylistic peculiarities of his altar, like the architecturally pronounced corners (cf. e.g. *CIL* VIII, 8456 from Sitifis) or the unusual spiral element (identical to *CIL* VIII, 2589 from Lambaesis).

¹⁹⁰ See above n. 39. The review was possibly initiated by Iulius Severus, the start of whose governorship is now datable to 'before the autumn of 130': A. Birley 2014, 243.

¹⁹¹ *CIL* XI, 5632 = *ILS* 2735.

¹⁹² A. Birley 2014, 247, rightly emphasises that the latter was not a separate command.

¹⁹³ A. Birley 1997, 198. This order seems more likely than the scenario suggested by Breeze *et al.* 2012, 18f.

¹⁹⁴ I include P. Cornelius Ur[...] (*RIB* 821), as the *cohors I Hispanorum* is the only known second-century garrison that was *equitata*. The early elements (*tria nomina*, filiation and *tribus*: see Davies 1977, 10) surely outweigh the abbreviation of the *cui praeest*-formula (cf. Jarrett and Stephens 1987, 63).

¹⁹⁵ No harm is done if Agrippa should have to come first because of the coincidence of the *expeditio Britannica* with Hadrian's visit advocated lastly by A. Birley 2014, 244ff. See above n. 152.

7. A curious passage in Dio Cassius

All this leads us towards a timetable which supports the hypothesis that it was actually the fort decision that was taken during Hadrian's visit. The impact of such a move would have been very decisive, making quite a bit of work redundant, completely upsetting the intricately planned network of Wall-Stanegate inter-visibilitys, and easily adding two years to the already titanic workload. Do any of our narrative sources contain possible resonances of such a potentially controversial decision? In the *Historia Augusta* there is a brief reference to Hadrian selecting the best fort locations himself,¹⁹⁶ though this is just part of a lengthier *topos* of the good general marching 20 miles fully armed with his troops, sharing their meals, etc. An equally well-known instance of the same fort-site *topos* appears in Tacitus' eulogy of Agricola: 'it was noted by experienced officers that no general had ever shown more judgment in choosing suitable positions.'¹⁹⁷

A less well-known, and rather curious, reference to the selection of fort sites, this time concerning Hadrian, is found in Dio Cassius' *Roman History*.¹⁹⁸ The context is a general description of the emperor's measures, disciplinary and otherwise, taken during his many inspection journeys to frontier areas. Most rather smack of being *topoi*, but there are some genuine nuggets of information, like the exploits of the Batavian cavalry. A striking passage concerns an appraisal of Hadrian as a fort builder, which is very oddly phrased: 'Some of these [forts] he removed to more desirable places, some he abolished, and he also established some new ones.' Fort abandonment and displacement is a curious deviation from tradition that was uncalled for in this context. This is not a *topos*; it must refer to a specific measure. In fact, Dio's description could not be more apt if the subject was the reshuffling of the British frontier garrisons occasioned by the fort decision. There is a distinct possibility, therefore, that it contains an original element, perhaps derived from Hadrian's autobiography, which refers to a highly controversial decision taken when the emperor visited and significantly modified his prestigious building project on the British frontier.

The impact of this decision on the ground will form the basis for a sequel to this paper.

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¹⁹⁷ Tacitus, *Agricola* 22.2.

¹⁹⁸ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 69.9.1–2.

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