

THE ANTONINE WALL

KEPPIE (L.) *The Antiquarian Rediscovery of the Antonine Wall*. Pp. xiv + 169, b/w & colour ills, b/w & colour maps. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2012. Cased, £30. ISBN: 978-1-908332-00-4. doi:10.1017/S0009840X13003375

This important volume provides a welcome, yet seldom discussed, perspective on the Antonine Wall, imperial Rome's one-time north-west frontier in central Scotland. While the Wall's now-traditional research agenda gives primacy to the Roman military archaeology of its original period of construction and operation as a Roman frontier (c. A.D. 142–60), K. shifts the focus away from the description and attempted reconstruction of the Roman remains to a new telling of the Wall's story as an object of speculation and study from the end of its Roman occupation to the arrival of its first major archaeological synthesis (George Macdonald, *The Roman Wall in Scotland* [1911]). As twentieth-century research has given a perhaps oversized role to the Wall's 20-year functional period, K.'s contribution is particularly valuable for its demonstration that the Wall can be reframed to address different questions and form a wider research agenda with the potential to draw in scholars from a number of disciplines and period specialisations. With a growing awareness of the Wall due to its 2008 inscription as an UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) – alongside Hadrian's Wall and the German *Limes* as part of the composite multinational 'Frontiers of the Roman Empire' WHS – and in light of recent developments in the study of Hadrian's Wall's post-Roman history and archaeology (e.g. R. Hingley, *Hadrian's Wall: a Life* [2012]), the Antonine Wall is poised to break out from the confines of its Roman military archaeology-focused research tradition. K.'s study thus provides an important step in broadening perspectives.

While K.'s stated aim is 'to provide a history of the Antonine Wall from the moment the Roman army abandoned it ... down to the early years of the 20th century', his title and additional aim 'to chart developments in our knowledge about it' (p. 1), reveal that the book may more accurately be characterised as a historiography that centres on the accumulation of antiquarian discoveries from the late sixteenth century onwards. Indeed, the limited availability of archaeological evidence and historical accounts for the Wall from the Roman withdrawal until the advent of what may be termed 'antiquarian' work in the later sixteenth century is reflected in the imbalanced coverage provided in the book. Chapters 1–2 (pp. 1–33) compress a knowledgeable summary introduction to the Wall's Roman history and remains, its topographic and toponymic landscape setting, a summary of under-explored post-Roman archaeological evidence (including an early medieval Thane's Hall, mottes and castles, churches and communities that developed on or against the Wall), and a rapid chronological overview of historical notices from Gildas (*De Excidio* 15–18) to George Buchanan, who wrote in the late sixteenth century and was the first to recognise the significant potential of inscriptions.

Less than a quarter of the book is devoted to the Wall's first 1,400 years, with the remainder focusing on just over three centuries; while this imbalance reflects the amount of known evidence, it is regrettable that K. did not take the opportunity to consider both the archaeological and historical material for this period in greater detail. Omitted, for example, is John Mair's (*Hist. Maj. Brit.* 2.1, 2.3) early sixteenth-century account that, admittedly, offers little new information, but nevertheless provides an important comparandus for the contemporary – but more influential – account of Hector Boece. Boece's account is also given too little discussion, with no mention of the continuing controversy surrounding Boece's sources, hints of the importance of this account's quick publication into the vernacular hidden in a

footnote (p. 33 n. 149), and with Boece's history misrepresented as supporting the claim that 'Julius Caesar was the earliest Roman to reach the Forth-Clyde isthmus' (p. 28), when in fact Boece was careful to note that this story is from 'our popular national annals', and he rejected its veracity, 'since none of the learned men who have written about Roman affairs with full accuracy assert that Caesar waged war against the Scots and the Picts' (*Scot. Hist.* 3.14). These issues aside, K.'s summary provides a generally accurate overview of what we know from the currently-available evidence for the Wall in its post-Roman and medieval centuries. A number of gaps and uncertainties remain, however, and this long period deserves continued investigation by both archaeologists and historians.

It is from the second half of the sixteenth century that K.'s analysis and attention to detail is at its best. From Chapters 3–7, K. marshals a wide range of antiquarian accounts, mapping projects and contextual details to tell the story of the Wall's documentation from the earliest detailed maps by Timothy Pont (completed between 1583–96) to the completion of the first campaigns of systematic archaeological excavation by the Glasgow Archaeological Society and Society of Antiquaries of Scotland between 1890–1910. Impressively, K. builds this history on dozens of unpublished manuscripts and documentary sources – including correspondence, minute books, notes and sketches – from archives across Great Britain, Ireland and the continent, along with the most complete bibliography of published books and articles relating to the Wall's pre-1911 investigation. The result is the most detailed synthesis of early work currently available, superior in every way to the earlier review provided in the second edition of Macdonald's (*The Roman Wall in Scotland*, second edition [1934], pp. 1–81) magisterial synthesis of the Antonine Wall's archaeology. K.'s treatment is both more detailed – including a fuller range of major and minor contributors – and less judgemental, explicitly recognising 'the value of the antiquarian record' (p. 6) and imploring current scholars to bring equal parts of grace and humility to bear on the assessment of both our own work and that of our predecessors: while 'we may look back on occasion at antiquarian accounts with some amusement, ... it is important to remember that we too stand at an intermediate point along the road to knowledge, and that future generations will continue to add to it' (p. 143).

The history presented in this volume may, perhaps, appear to be too linear and progressive, emphasising individuals and discoveries that have directly contributed to current understandings of what may be viewed as the Wall's 'authentic' Roman past, and there is a sense that K.'s 'road to knowledge' is envisaged as one of ever-increasing accuracy. More implicit in K.'s approach, however, is an understanding of more complex genealogical processes of discontinuity, discovery, loss and recovery, and the repression of ideas that do not fit accepted interpretations. Failure to consider the testimony and interpretations of previous generations not only robs us of an understanding of the Wall's (sometimes alternative) significance in earlier periods, but also contributes to the loss of former knowledge: knowledge that developed in particular historical contexts when the Wall may have inhabited drastically different cultural and physical landscapes, and when it was in a better state of survival.

K.'s primary contribution with this volume is the re-introduction of the Wall's antiquarian history to current discourse, highlighting the breadth and depth of antiquarian inquiry, and raising the profile of forgotten figures and episodes as it developed from an enigmatic landscape feature to an important subject of Roman frontier archaeology. While the Wall's 20-year role as a Roman frontier continues to require additional research, K. has provided a firm foundation for a number of new opportunities to consider its role in the ideological and physical landscapes of its post-Roman centuries.

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