

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON NATIVE AND ROMAN TRADE IN THE NORTH OF BRITAIN

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Over the years there has been much debate on the effect of the Roman invasion on the native population of Britain and in particular the effect of Hadrian's Wall cutting across the territory of the Brigantes. In 1980 Howard Kilbride-Jones,¹ repeating his thesis of 1938,² said 'it must be remembered that the Civil Province was out of bounds to Traprain Law goods' and talked of dress-fasteners being 'sneaked' into the Civil Province. The object of this paper is to look at this statement in the light of recent work on the artefacts from the native settlement sites and military sites in the environs of Hadrian's Wall in an attempt to discover whether the presence of the Roman forces had any effect on the trading patterns in the north of Britain.

There have already been several papers looking at Roman objects from non-Roman sites in Scotland.³ This paper will largely concentrate on native objects found on military sites in a geographical area north of the Stanegate and south of the Antonine Wall with much of the evidence coming from the county of Northumberland, a distribution which reflects a bias of archaeological effort rather than the density of population in the Roman period. The discussion should also be regarded as interim: a statement of results so far, and not as a final comment. A full catalogue of artefacts has not been included as the majority are already published or in the process of being published, nor is every example of each type referred to. Pottery and coins are also omitted as they fall outside the remit of the present author and carry with them their own problems of interpretation.⁴

Native sites in the area, on the whole, produce few finds so objects of Roman origin are particularly noticeable, for example melon beads.⁵ Guido's account of blue glass melon beads⁶ refers to their discovery in 3rd and 2nd century BC contexts on the Continent but states that no pre-Roman examples have been found in Britain. The majority of British examples come from sites with Flavian or Antonine dates followed by a gap in the chronology until they re-emerge in post-Roman times. Melon beads are normally found as single finds and it may be suggested that they were not used as necklace beads but had some talismanic significance. This is confirmed by dolabra sheaths now in Bonn Museum which have melon beads hanging from the rings.⁷ Although imitation melon beads appear to have been manufactured in Roman Britain⁸ the majority, and certainly those found in the north, were of Continental manufacture.

A number of intaglios have been found on Romano-British settlement sites in the area under review. These are clearly luxury items and may have been in the nature of presents or bribes to a local leader from the military authorities or possibly loose finds or booty. To accept them as trade items presupposes a taste for them, the money to spend on such frivolities and the understanding of what they were for. Would a native Briton understand the significance of the scene on the Hartburn intaglio which shows Achilles dragging the corpse of Hector around the

walls of Troy?⁹ This intaglio is made of orange glass, unusual in itself, and has a very detailed scene which indicates the work of a skilled craftsman (Pl.).

From Dryburgh comes an onyx intaglio with the figure of Bonus Eventus standing front and facing left, holding a patera.¹⁰ This might be seen as appealing to local taste more than Achilles as would the black jasper, also from Dryburgh,¹¹ which shows two animals leaping up at a tree, but it is difficult to see these intaglios as trade objects. Possibly they were dropped by military personnel from the fort at Newstead and picked up by the locals because of their aesthetic appeal.¹²

Brooches found on native sites vary considerably in type but tend to be of early date. Doubstead has produced an incomplete Nauheim derivative brooch¹³ and there is a complete example from the recent excavations at Dod Law.¹⁴ Also from Dod Law hillfort came a brooch of the Hod Hill type which is not to be expected beyond AD 60 according to Don Mackreth.¹⁵ Such brooches are rarely found north of the Humber and the appearance of an example on an Iron Age hillfort in Northumberland, predating much of the military activity in the area, is puzzling.

The site at Whitekirk in Midlothian has produced a dolphin brooch of 2nd century date¹⁶ whilst from Bow Broch comes an enamelled brooch in the form of a cock:¹⁷ a form of brooch found in military contexts in the eastern counties of Britain and thought to have been produced in the Rhineland.¹⁸

In her discussion of Roman finds from Scotland Robertson lists a number of paterae and other bronze vessels.¹⁹ Unfortunately few, if any, of these can be associated with native use. The majority are likely to have been casual losses by the Roman army or, like many of the Roman coins found in Scotland,²⁰ later introductions. The set of paterae and cauldrons found at Prestwick Carr²¹ in Northumberland, for example, was found in a marsh and cannot be seen as evidence for either settlement or a permanent military presence. A very fine bronze colander of 1st century AD date found at Whitfield²² to the north of Hadrian's Wall may be an exception as it was found with three large cauldrons of native type. In marked contrast to the cauldrons, which were heavily repaired, the colander is in pristine condition, almost unused. This is a unusual find in a native context and again one wonders if it was a gift or a chance find. Colanders of this type were originally of Italian manufacture but were produced in Gaul and Germany after the 1st century AD.²³ A single find, apparently unused, does not suggest the brisk trade in luxury tableware between North Britain and the other provinces of the Empire which might be implied by the finds list for Scotland, where paterae have been found in association with native goods in hoards, apparently hidden for reuse in metalworking.²⁴

Iron objects found in the area are often difficult to assign to military or civilian origins, particularly as iron tools and implements found in native contexts are conspicuous by their absence. Piggott identified a scythe, field anvil, sickle, buttress and two hipposandals from the Carlingwark, Eckford and Blackburn Mill hoards as being specifically Roman in type, whilst sword-tips, mail, tyres, lynchpins, horsebits, cauldron chains and a shield boss he saw as native.²⁵



Pl.: The Hartburn intaglio.

However, the methods by which the smiths or scrap-metal merchants of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD came by their hoards of bronze or iron is open to conjecture and may not give any helpful clues as to trading patterns. In fact how many of the objects of Roman design referred to above arrived at their eventual findspot is unclear. The quantity of finds does not suggest a healthy trade flow. The number of settlement sites in the area which have produced no finds at all may be taken to imply a lack of interest in material possessions and complete apathy in objects used by the Roman military other than for scrap value.

On the other hand there is a large body of evidence to suggest a brisk trade in native objects to the Roman troops. Firstly terrets: these were used in sets of five for a paired draught although full sets are rarely found. The shape and decoration of these pieces have their origin in the Early Iron Age and often display characteristically Celtic designs well into the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. The simple type MacGregor saw as having a gradual development 'in the hands of Iron Age B craftsmen, augmented by a possible adoption by Belgic incomers whose Continental background had not equipped them for chariotry'.²⁶ The various forms of terrets may be seen as appealing to tribal preferences - the crescent terrets, for example, being confined to the area of the Catuvellauni and the Trinovantes, whilst platform terrets appear to have been an Icenian invention and the massive terrets found favour with the Maeatae and the Caledonii. It is, however, the knobbed terrets which seem to have appealed to the military population with the majority being found in forts or milecastles such as Benwell,²⁷ Birrens,²⁸ Carlisle,²⁹ Vindolanda,³⁰ Chesters,³¹ Great Chesters,³² High Rochester,³³ Housesteads,³⁴ Newstead,³⁵ Poltross Burn³⁶ and Nether Denton.³⁷

Among the more ambiguous finds from the area are torcs. Despite their obvious Celtic ancestry torcs present problems when assigning them to a purely military or purely civilian function as neck rings are known to have been awarded to legionaries for deeds of bravery and later as symbols of good luck. An example was found in 1983 in Caw Gap,³⁸ just to the north of Hadrian's Wall. It is fashioned to look like a string of fifteen beads, the end beads having mortise holes into which the tenons of the missing shank would have fitted. The notion of having the beads confined to the front became part of torc design from the earliest La Tène period, and their distribution in Britain is largely in the area north of the Humber-Mersey line and south of the rivers Forth and Clyde. They can be dated to the 1st century AD and were made by Celtic craftsmen according to MacGregor.³⁹ Similar torcs are known from Whitekirk,⁴⁰ Lamberton Moor⁴¹ and Carlisle.⁴² There has been much discussion as to whether torcs of this particular type were native neck ornaments or military decorations but most of the sculptural evidence shows the torcs worn by soldiers to be the penannular twisted or tubular types rather than the beaded. Torcs were also presented to whole units; in fact eleven units are known to have had the appellation torquata of which two were stationed in Britain.⁴³ In these cases the torcs were presumably of gold or silver and carried on the unit's standards. The Caw Gap torc, despite its findspot, is likely to be native, largely because it is of bronze and also because the beaded torc stems from a solid native Celtic tradition.

The Benwell torc presents even more difficulties in assigning it

to military or native use. It was found in 1937 in a building in the retentura of the fort.⁴⁴ It is also of bronze and again falls into the beaded class although in this case the rather angular beads are strung onto a hollow tube ending in iron tenons. It is not attractive and it may be the insensitivity of the piece which led Richmond to assign it to a Roman military workshop. He actually described it as 'designed like a girder, in a manner devoid of all artistic feeling'.⁴⁵ Valerie Maxfield, however, in 1974 came to the conclusion that the Benwell torc was native as it bears no resemblance to any known representation of a military torc whilst it can be assigned to a native type.⁴⁶

Roman brooches found on native sites have been discussed above. There are, however, many more brooches of local manufacture to be found in military contexts. Trumpet brooches are often seen as being military in type and appear in turrets on Hadrian's Wall which were never occupied by civilians,⁴⁷ as well as being ubiquitous on fort sites, yet the evidence suggests that they are of native manufacture with possible factories at Brough-in-Westmorland, Stanwix and Traprain Law.⁴⁸ The early examples have swirling Celtic motifs which deteriorate into a muddle of geometric units as the 2nd century progresses. Their use of enamel has been seen by MacGregor⁴⁹ as indicating that they were successors to the harness and sword fittings as a product of the native factories but the present author prefers to see them as parallel productions.

Enamelling was very much a Celtic skill and used to great effect on the 90 trumpet brooches, 25 head-stud brooches and 10 dragonsque brooches found so far in the area.⁵⁰ The latter tend to cluster thickly north of a line joining the Humber and Mersey estuaries and south of the Forth-Clyde line, covering a date range of a hundred years from the Claudian conquest to the mid or possibly late 2nd century. Such brooches might be seen as the response of local craftsmen to the gaudy taste of the military.

Several excellent papers have been written on the subject of button-and-loop fasteners and it is not the intention of the present author to discuss whether such fasteners were used for dress or harness. For the purpose of this paper, however, it is interesting to note that one third of the known examples has a native findspot whilst the rest come from Roman military sites. The earliest members of Wild's Class I could be Iron Age in date but the Class III examples date from Flavian times to the late 2nd century whilst some of Class V were still in use in the 4th century at Traprain Law.⁵¹ Many have Celtic motifs as decoration but a few have a distinctly Roman flavour, for example there is one incised with an eagle from Corbridge⁵² and another in the shape of a stylized vine-leaf from Chesters.⁵³ This again looks like native craftsmen pandering to the taste of their military customers.

Ring-headed pins are well known in Iron Age Britain. MacGregor has suggested that the absence of such pins 'from Roman sites would seem to favour manufacture before full-scale occupation of northern England' but that the use of enamel on some pins would suggest that they carried on well into the Roman period.⁵⁴ Since 1976, however, several have emerged from Roman contexts - many excavated in the nineteenth century and hidden in museum stores. Examples are now known from Corbridge,⁵⁵ Great Chesters,⁵⁶ Halton Chesters,⁵⁷ Housesteads,⁵⁸ South Shields⁵⁹ and

Winshields Milecastle⁶⁰ - enough examples to postulate a native artefact being traded to the military.

Only two tankard handles are known from the area but both have clear affinities with known Celtic examples: the Wallsend⁶¹ example having a very close parallel in the handle from Oxstrow Broch⁶² whilst the example from the Corbridge Hoard⁶³ has much in common with a handle from Neath.⁶⁴

'Weaving combs' are common on Iron Age sites in Britain and are increasingly found on Roman military sites. These are strips of bone or antler, about 15cm long and 3cm wide with teeth indented at one end. They appear to be peculiar to the British Isles and their function is open to argument. Traditionally they are associated with textile production but this is by no means certain and their regular discovery inside forts might be seen as an argument against. Along Hadrian's Wall they have been found at Carlisle,⁶⁵ Chesters,⁶⁶ Corbridge,⁶⁷ Housesteads,⁶⁸ South Shields⁶⁹ and Wallsend.⁷⁰

Another bone object which has Iron Age antecedents and has been associated with textiles is the sheep's metacarpal bobbin. In 1970 Wild described these as being unique to the British Isles⁷¹ but two are known from Zugmantel.⁷² They are common finds on military sites such as Chesters,⁷³ Corbridge,⁷⁴ South Shields,⁷⁵ Wallsend⁷⁶ and Housesteads⁷⁷ but despite their known native origin none have been found on native sites north of Hadrian's Wall and it is possible that they were being traded from the south.

A final group which needs to be considered are the glass armlets. These were first discussed by Kilbride-Jones in 1938⁷⁸ and on several occasions since by Stephenson.⁷⁹ Kilbride-Jones divided them into three types, types 2 and 3 of which he regarded as proof of his hypothesis that Hadrian's Wall formed an effective trade barrier against native-made products infiltrating southwards as they never appeared further south than Hadrian's Wall. The few which he was aware of in the south he wrote off as 'probably carried south as curiosities'. However, since 1938 many armlets have been found in the south, far more than can be explained away as mere curiosities, particularly as they tend to group down the west coast into Wales in a manner which suggests that they were being traded along the route used for black-burnished pottery.

Kilbride-Jones put forward the theory that Hadrian's Wall permitted southern-made objects to be exported to the north but would not allow movement south. The evidence, however seems to suggest the contrary: that trade was brisk north to south and negligible south to north. The Roman finds on native sites are few and tend towards the luxurious and can be seen either as presents - official blackmail to local leaders; booty of guerilla raids; stolen goods; or scrap metal. The native finds on fort sites are to be found in great numbers, only a sample of which have been described above. Hadrian's Wall seen in purely commercial terms must have appeared to the locals as tantamount to the Klondyke in America - thousands of people suddenly set down in a narrowly confined area with money to spend. All the locals had to do was to provide a steady stream of artefacts to the incomers' taste. Any army on duty in a foreign land appears to be gripped with the urge to

spend. How many houses in Britain have elephant umbrella stands, Indian inlaid tables and other objects of a similar nature as a result of a member of the family having served abroad some time in the last 100 years? No doubt the Roman army felt the same and when off duty would be on the lookout for native artefacts. Behind Hadrian's Wall there would have been few trading opportunities until York so there would be little incentive in transporting products when there was an easily accessible market on the Wall.

To sum up: the hypothesis based on analysis of finds from the northern military zone is that the Romans were not selling to the native population north of Hadrian's Wall but the locals were using the presence of the military as a trading opportunity and the 'factories' north and south of the Wall were sending their goods to the forts. One might go so far as to see the lack of metalworking to be found in the 4th century as a collapse in the market as the troops were slowly withdrawn to other trouble spots.

NOTES

1. KILBRIDE-JONES, 1980, 36.
2. KILBRIDE-JONES, 1938, 366-95.
3. CURLE, 1913; CURLE, 1932; ROBERTSON, 1970.
4. see CASEY, 1986, 108-9.
5. Examples are known from Castlehill (Strathclyde): CURLE, 1932, 377, no.44; Hyndford (Lanarks.): CURLE, 1932, 381, no.51; Dod Law (Northd.): Allason-Jones in SMITH, forthcoming; Holywell (Berwicks.), Glass Rigg (Dumfries.), Crossmichael (Dumfries.), Glen Luce (Dumfries.) and New Luce (Dumfries.): ROBERTSON, 1970, 224; Dowalton Loch (Dumfries.), Lochlee (Strathclyde), and Lochspouts (Strathclyde): ROBERTSON, 1970, Table III; Camphouse (Rox.): CURLE, 1932, 363, no.18.
6. GUIDO, 1978, 100.
7. CURLE, 1911, 279.
8. GUIDO, 1978, 37.
9. JOBEY, 1973, 44, pl.V; HENIG, 1978, App.72.
10. HENIG, 1978, no.219.
11. HENIG, 1978, no.499.
12. See also an onyx intaglio from Overwells, Jedburgh, showing a satyr walking right: HENIG, 1978, no.176.
13. JOBEY, 1982, 15-17, fig.7, no.2.
14. Allason-Jones in SMITH, forthcoming.

15. Pers. comm.
16. ROBERTSON, 1970, Table V.
17. CURLE, 1932, 351, no.1, fig.34.
18. For other brooches of Roman manufacture found in Scotland see ROBERTSON, 1970.
19. ROBERTSON, 1970.
20. CASEY, 1986, 108-9.
21. HODGKIN, 1892, 159-60.
22. SMITH, 1969, 172-81.
23. BOESTERD, 1956, 19-21.
24. ROBERTSON, 1970; PIGGOTT, 1955.
25. PIGGOTT, 1955.
26. MACGREGOR, 1976, 42.
27. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.70.
28. MACGREGOR, 1976, nos.65, 66; BIRLEY, 1938, 337, 336, fig.38.2, 1.
29. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.78.
30. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.81.
31. MACGREGOR, 1976, nos.67, 49; PHILIPSON, 1886, Pl.XIX,31.
32. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.83.
33. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.71; BRUCE, 1880, 145, no.776.
34. MACGREGOR, 1976, nos.84, 85.
35. MACGREGOR, 1976, nos.63, 73.
36. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.99; GIBSON & SIMPSON, 1911, fig.21.13.
37. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.98; BUDGE, 1903, 408, no.184.
38. ALLASON-JONES, 1984, 227-8.
39. MACGREGOR, 1976, 97-9.
40. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.206.
41. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.203.

42. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.199.
43. Ala Petriana stationed at Stanwix (RIB 957) and ala Gallorum et Thracum Classiana, known to have been stationed in Britain but only attested by diplomas of AD 105 and AD 122 (CIL XI.6033; XVI.51; XVI.69).
44. SIMPSON & RICHMOND, 1941, 23-5, pl.II.
45. SIMPSON & RICHMOND, 1941, 24.
46. MAXFIELD, 1974, 41-7.
47. ALLASON-JONES, 1988.
48. COLLINGWOOD, 1930, 37-58; KILBRIDE-JONES, 1980, 34-8; MACGREGOR, 1976, 124.
49. MACGREGOR, 1976, 124.
50. Inf. M. Snape, Archaeology Department, The University, Newcastle upon Tyne.
51. WILD, 1970a, 37-55.
52. Unpublished. Corbridge Site Museum.
53. MACGREGOR, 1976, fig.7, no.17.
54. MACGREGOR, 1976, 139.
55. FORSTER & KNOWLES, 1911, 189, fig.34.
56. Museum of Antiquities of the University and Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, Acc.No.1956.150.18.A.
57. PSAN⁴ I, 1923-4, 206, no.V.
58. Unpublished. Housesteads Site Museum.
59. ALLASON-JONES & MIKET, 1984, no.3.536.
60. Unpublished. Chesters Museum. See also HODDER & HEDGES, 1977, 17.
61. Allason-Jones in DANIELS, forthcoming.
62. MACGREGOR, 1976, no.291.
63. ALLASON-JONES & BISHOP, 1988.
64. CORCORAN, 1953, fig.1c.
65. Unpublished. Tullie House Museum, Carlisle.
66. Chesters Museum, Acc.Nos.630, 631; BUDGE, 1903, 369, nos.335-6.

67. Corbridge Site Museum, Acc.Nos.75.1629; 75.1627; 75.1626; 75.1628; 75.1625.
68. Unpublished. Chesters Museum, Acc.No.1909.10.
69. ALLASON-JONES & MIKET, 1984, no.2.23.
70. Allason-Jones in DANIELS, forthcoming.
71. WILD, 1970b, 34.
72. ORL 8, Taf.XX, nos.91, 92.
73. Chesters Museum, Acc.No.472; BUDGE, 1903, 368, no.147.
74. Allason-Jones in BISHOP & DORE, forthcoming.
75. Allason-Jones in MIKET, 1983, fig.81, no.11; ALLASON-JONES & MIKET, 1984, no.3.24.
76. Allason-Jones in DANIELS, forthcoming.
77. Unpublished. Housesteads Site Museum.
78. KILBRIDE-JONES, 1938.
79. STEVENSON, 1957; STEVENSON, 1976.

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