

MEMOIR

CONCERNING THE ROMAN PROGRESS IN SCOTLAND

TO THE

NORTH OF THE GRAMPIAN HILLS.

By the Rev. Mr Grant, Minister of Boharn.

THE prejudices, arising from the idea of Caledonian independence, now begin to subside ; and Scotsmen allow equal force to the same degree of evidence for the Roman progress in their native country, as they do in regard to Germany, or any other province they are not particularly interested in.

This evidence is not to be derived from the legendary tales of our historians, nor the idle theories of our antiquaries. The source whence we are to draw authentic information concerning the early ages of British history, is from the Greek and Roman writers. The accounts they give us of their own transactions in this island, are confirmed by those stupendous monuments of their power and industry that yet remain,—as walls, stations, military roads, and ruins of towns. They were also curious in their inquiries concerning our manners, customs, and original.

I hope the time is at last come, when, under the influence of the Antiquarian Society established in Scotland, our antiquities will be rescued from the mists of ignorance, and the phantoms of credulity,—when the fabrications of monks will be treated with contempt, and the prejudices of national vanity no longer will warp the judgment, but truth and sound criticism succeed in room of both.

Guided by these principles, Mr Barclay of Urie has established an opinion I long entertained, that the battle between Galgacus and Agricola was fought near to Stonehive, on Campstone Hill. Had the account given of Agricola's eighth campaign by Tacitus, been attended to, it could not have escaped notice, that the scene of that campaign and action was near the sea coast. The land army and fleet co-operated in attacking the enemy, and supporting each other. This was also the case in his sixth and seventh campaigns; and a chain of fortified camps are yet to be seen, from Camelon to the extensive works on Finlystone Hill. These are the stations occupied by Agricola during the three years he employed on his progress northwards, on his crossing the Bodotria.

Though Finlystone Hill was the extremity of Agricola's penetrating by land; in the same season, his fleet discovered and conquered the Orkney islands. Of this conquest Juvenal speaks, and calls them "*modo captas Orcadas*."*

Suetonius informs us that Domitian continued to give attention to Agricola's conquests, and sent Sallustius Lucullus, as his lieutenant, into Britain, who was an enterprising officer.

From this time, to about the year 140, in the reign of Antoninus Pius, we have but short and imperfect accounts of the state of

* Juvenalis, Sat. ii. l. 162.—Suetonii Vita Domit. c. x.

affairs in Britain. Some inscriptions that are extant, and Capitolinus, make us acquainted with the Wall of Antoninus.* Though there is but little particular information remaining of this period, yet we cannot doubt that the Romans explored the country by sea and land.

This is fully supported by the Geography of Ptolemy of Alexandria. In his Geographical Tables, he gives the longitude and latitude of the sea coasts of Albion, the island of Britain, and of a great number of inland places. He does not confine this to the southern parts of the island, but also extends it through the whole of Scotland.

Making some allowances for the inaccuracy of the observations communicated to him, there is more exactness in the relative situation he gives to places, than at first could be looked for. The east, in our modern maps, is the west in his map. Notwithstanding this, and that he makes the coasts of Scotland tend to the east, instead of running north, or nearly so, he lays down the places agreeably to their real situation on the respective sides of the island.

His tables have been oft misrepresented and tortured, to support theory, or mere opinion. This proceeded from not delineating a map, according to the degrees he assigns. Had this been done, *Ptoroton* or *Castra Alata* would never have been placed at Cramond or Edinburgh, but where Ptolemy places it, on the *Sinus Vararis*, the Murray Firth.

But allowing Ptolemy's Geography to be more inaccurate than it is, it decidedly proves that, when he wrote, the Romans were well acquainted with the interior country of the north of Scotland, as well as the sea coasts. At this day, there are re-

* Jul. Capitol. Anton. Pius, c. v.

mains of Roman encampments, that ascertain with a high degree of probability, if not absolute certainty, the situation of many places he mentions to the north of the Grampians.

Tuessis is placed by Ptolemy on the *Sinus Vararis*, in the country of the Vacomagi, and nearly corresponds to the site of Gordon Castle. An English mile to the north of this castle, are the remains of an encampment, which, from its square figure, and the ditch and rampart, has every appearance of being Roman. It contains about four acres of ground, and was originally intended to cover the ford of the river Tuessis, or Spey, which at that period ran at the foot of the bank on which the station was placed.

Ptolemy mentions *Ptoroton Stratopedon*, in the same country of the Vacomagi, which, from the situation he assigns it on the *Sinus Vararis*, and relation to the Tuessis, can be no other place than what is now called the Burgh, a fisher town in the parish of Duffus. It has an harbour, not contemptible for a Roman fleet. On the land side it was regularly and strongly fortified by two ditches, and three ramparts, cut out of the solid rock, of which the remains are visible. There have been considerable buildings in this place, as the neighbouring people were long in the practice of carrying away immense quantities of cut free stone, employed in them; and, from the hollow sound within the fortifications, it is probable there are vaults yet unopened.

The Danes and Orkney-men made it a place of arms for protecting their barks, when they established themselves in Duffeyras and Murray, in the eleventh century, after conquering that country, by their general Helgy, the founder of Helgyn, or Elgin.*

Banatia is also in the country of the Vacomagi, and mentioned by the Alexandrian geographer, as in the neighbourhood of Tuessis and Ptoroton.

* *Orcades Torfæi*, p. 12, 13, 28, 31, 93.

When the river Ness issues from the loch, it runs about five or six hundred yards, and falls into another small loch, that is bent into a semicircular figure, and with the river forms a peninsula. On this slip of ground there has been a military station of two small forts. The outer fort is a square of 50 paces by 53, which on the one side is protected by the river, and on the other by the small loch; and, next the field, it has a ditch and rampart. The ditch is 14 feet wide. On the inner side of the peninsula is another rampart and ditch, of the former breadth. The other square fort has rather the appearance of being built with modern masonry. It is 24 paces on each side.

These forts cover the ford of the Ness, in modern English called the Bona, or Bunes; but in Erse, the ancient dialect of the country, it is called Bana. From this similarity of names, and being in the country of the Vacomagi, I have thought that it is the Roman Banatia, though the position assigned by Ptolemy is rather against that; yet I can entertain no doubt of this place being a Roman station, though it should not be allowed to be the Banatia of Ptolemy.

The situation of Tamea agrees to that of Braemar Castle; but, as far as I have been informed, there are no appearances of Roman works in that neighbourhood; though, as it is mentioned by Ptolemy, I entertain little doubt but in time such will be discovered.

Dio Cassius wrote his history by the particular direction of the Emperor Severus. His information may be considered as authentic in what regards Severus's operations in North Britain, as he relates events that either passed under his own eye, or were reported to him by those who were principally engaged in them. His testimony is express, that Severus lost 50,000 men in this expedition, but penetrated, by land, to the northern extremities of

the island. This he confirms by observations made on the different lengths of the days and nights in these regions, from what they are in Italy.

Ammianus Marcellinus gives an account of Theodosius's expedition into Britain, and mentions his establishing the *Provincia Valentia*; but, from the narrative, we cannot conjecture how far north he marched. The information as to this is to be collected from Claudian.* He speaks of Theodosius as defeating the Saxons in the Orkneys; the Picts in Thule, probably the country from the Grampians to the river Varar, or Farar;—and conquering the Scots in Hierne, or Ierne, which I take to be that tract of Scotland to the west and north of Antoninus' Wall: for, in his panegyric on the iv. Coss. of Honorius, he lays the scene of these exploits in the country of Caledonia, or north of Scotland.† He also applies the same epithets to Caledonia and Ierne,—*glacialis Ierne*,—*Caledoniæ Pruinæ*; and the *Ignotum Fretum* is probably the Firth of Clyde, or some of the lochs in Dunbarton and Argyleshires, that, under the later emperors, and in these disturbances, the Romans had become unacquainted with.‡

Besides these historical relations of the Roman conquests in the north of Scotland, and the remains of fortifications, having every appearance of being erected by that warlike and industrious people in the country in question, funeral urns, medals, and weapons have been discovered, which also afford additional evidence of their progress.

Two urns, full of ashes, were lately found in Findlater, at the town of Brankanentum, in two large heaps of stones; one of them

* Claudian, de iii. Coss. Hon. l. 53, 54.

† De iv. Coss. Hon. l. 26-33.

‡ De Laudib. Süllico. lib. ii. l. 246-253.

had a cover, with the figure of something like a pine-apple on the top of the cover, but was broken in digging it out. The other had a cover of a flat stone, and was rudely carved.

In the same neighbourhood, several years ago, were discovered some medals, that are preserved at Cullen House. Gordon, I think, mentions them in his *Itinerarium Septentrionale*.

Another urn, also full of ashes, was found near to Gordonstoun, and is in excellent preservation with Sir William Gordon.

Two more were dug out of a heap of stones near to Lethen; but, from the precipitancy of labourers, were broken in pieces.

All these I consider as Roman, from the materials they were made of, baked clay, and their shape; and I have not seen evidence that our ancestors burned their dead. They buried them in stone coffins, or under small arches of half burned clay, as in the muir at the kirk of Alvey in Badenoch.

The heads of *pilums*, of different shapes for the foot and horse, have been also discovered in Moray and Nairnshires. It is true, that they are of that species of copper that Pliny calls *Caldarium*; and it is said that these arms were the weapons of the natives, and are not Roman, as they used iron.* To this it may be replied, that Livy says that the arms of the Romans were originally all of copper. Cæsar used the same metal in refitting his fleet:† and Dio Cassius informs, that sometimes the points of the Roman daggers were of iron;‡ which implies, that the remainder of the blade was of another metal, copper. And I have been told, that all the extant arms and tools of that illustrious people are of copper. Herodian asserts that, in his time, the natives knew the use

* Hist. Mundi, Lib. xxxiv. c. 8.—Livii Hist. Rom. Lib. i.

† Cæsar de Bell. Gall. Lib. iv. c. 31.

‡ Dio Cassii Hist. Rom. Lib. xxxviii.

of iron, and therefore might employ it in their arms, as well as the Romans.*

Thus, the Roman progress is traced to Inverness, by ancient geography and history, encampments and weapons, urns and coins. The proofs taken from each of these sources, single and unconnected, might give a certain degree of probability to the opinion; but united, they have, on the whole, such evidence as establishes it as a fact we may depend on. They receive additional strength from the geographical treatise *de Situ Britanniae*, and the map that accompanies it.

The MS. of this dissertation was discovered and published at Copenhagen, by Mr Bertram, in 1757. The author is supposed to be Richard of Cirencester, a monk of Westminster, who made the history of Britain the object of his studies. Whoever was the author, the work has merit, and claims attention, as it illustrates the geography and history of the island; and, though written by a monk of the thirteenth century, is not to be classed among the futile productions of that age. It is the composition of one conversant with the best writers of antiquity; and who had the discernment to select what was valuable, and adapted to the nature of his dissertation. Cæsar and Tacitus, Lucan and Claudian, were familiar to him. He also was possessed of other sources of information, equally important, that are now lost. From all which, he obtained an accurate knowledge of even the interior and northern parts of Scotland.

Particularly, he mentions an itinerary of a Roman officer, from which he gives a variety of routes, different from those of Antoninus; and carries two of these from Ptoroton, the one to Luguballium, along the sea coast, the other cross the country, by Varis and Tamea, to Isca Damnoniorum.

* Herod. Hist. Lib. iii.

The map is a great curiosity. What stamps it with value and authenticity, and demonstrates that the author had his materials from the most genuine sources, is, that the places in Scotland he has laid down as Roman stations, have been verified by discoveries of Roman works at or near them. He mentions the camp on Finlystone Hill, and calls it *Immane Castrum*. Nay, this map has made places far in the north of Scotland be investigated as Roman stations, that, before the publication of it, were not thought of; and, upon inquiry, they have been found to be Roman stations; particularly at the place assigned to the *Aræ Finium Imperii Romani*, or the Cairns of Tarbet Ness.

I beg leave to give a short description of them, and the works in the neighbourhood, which indicate the labours of a foreign people, the Romans.

There are two cairns. The western one is raised five or six feet, on a base of seventy-two feet in circumference, and upon that a small pyramid is built, six feet broad at the bottom, and elevated a few feet. This cairn is called *Ulli-Vacum*. The other cairn is east from the first about two hundred paces, and is of similar shape, on a base of only half the dimensions, but rises to much about the same height. It is called *Spadie-Lingum*. They are both constructed, without any art, of earth, and the common muir stone.

A mile to the north-west of them, is a place on the sea shore, called *Port-a-chaistel*, where there is an excellent harbour; and, on the rising ground that commands it, are the vestiges of a military station and building, surrounded with two ditches, 20 feet asunder, and each of them 12 feet wide. The circumference of the area inclosed by the inner ditch is 100 feet, from which there runs southward a rampart about a quarter of a mile in length, with many curves and angles in it.

Near the outer ditch, and not far from the point of the rock above the harbour, is a beautiful square fortification, of about an hundred paces of a side; and through the muir, near a mile round, are formed many circular fortifications, about forty feet in circumference, with ramparts running southward from them, in the same stile as in the one mentioned before. This square has the appearance of a *Prætorium*; and the other works have probably been barracks for hutting the troops. From the regularity and care taken in these constructions, they have every appearance of being Roman.

This discovery at Tarbet Ness, and the coincidence of the map with modern discoveries in other places, give us the most favourable idea of the author's accuracy, when not so well supported by extant collateral evidence.

Richard mentions in his map a description of Caledonia, a province which the Romans occupied for some time. It extended north from Agricola's *Prætentura*, to the *Aræ Finium Imperii Romani*, and was conquered in Domitian's reign. It had the name *Vespasiana*, from that of the imperial family; and, under Theodosius, was called Thule, as probably it was in Juvenal's time.* Richard says, that it was subject to the Romans but a short time; and they totally lost it soon after Marcus Aurelius, except during the transient invasion of Severus.

This is the monk's account of this province; and he is singular in mentioning it, as no ancient writer, nor any of the middle ages, that have been published, take notice of it. Though his testimony stands alone, instead of being disregarded, it ought to have great weight, as he appears in every other particular to be well inform-

* Juvenalis Sat. xv. l. 111, 112.

ed, and faithful to such of his authorities as are now extant, which we have an opportunity of examining.

But, independently of this, I acknowledge my partiality to his relation, when I recollect the Roman encampments, their funeral urns, coins, and weapons, found within the limits of this *Provincia Vespasiana*. They prove the Roman progress through the greatest part of its extent, however short time they maintained possession; and Richard allows that this was the case.

In itself, it is highly probable that the Romans would attempt the conquest, and in a great measure subdue that part of the island in question. Nor is any time more likely than that assigned by Richard. Agricola conquered, and secured, it by posts to the foot of the Grampians, where the Caledonians fought, were defeated, and, by giving hostages, acknowledged themselves subjects of the empire. In the same season, his fleet conquered the Orkneys, and sailed round Britain. This afforded the not distant prospect, that an island might be easily subdued. Such a steady and enterprising general as Agricola would have soon effectuated it, had not Domitian's jealousy recalled him. His successor, Lucullus, was also eminent in the military line; but he was put to death by the same tyrant, for giving his own name to a particular kind of spear which he invented.

May it not be conjectured that Agricola's fleet touched at Ptoroton, Banatia, and Tarbet Ness;—that Lucullus fortified them and Tamea, and so carried the Roman arms, by land, from the camp on Finlystone Hill, the last of Agricola's, to the northern limits of the *Provincia Vespasiana*;—that Severus adopted the same plan, and added some additional works at the *Aræ Finium Imperii Romani*?

The Romans soon relinquished the possession of this province,

as, in its uncultivated state, and exposed to the vigorous attacks of the Caledonians, then crowded among their hills, it was formidable, and not worth the retaining. This accounts for the only remains they left in it being of the military kind. Inscriptions, baths, and roads, are works of peaceable times, and permanent establishments.

I scarcely believe the Romans penetrated into every glen and forest in the Highlands of Caledonia. In that case, their route would have been marked by fortified camps, as in the country of the Silures and Ordovices. To the north of the Grampians these have, as yet, been only found along the sea coasts. Perhaps, when a more accurate search is made, others may be discovered, at some distance from the shores; but I am persuaded they will not be many, as the Romans principally occupied the Lowlands of the *Provincia Vespasiana*. This inquiry is an object that I hope will not be neglected.

This Memoir is respectfully submitted to the Society of Antiquaries. And though they should judge that the proof of the Roman progress into Caledonia is not complete, they will observe that there is a great degree of evidence in support of it,—greater than perhaps many Scotsmen will allow. But it may gratify national pride, that if Caledonia was conquered, it was by the conquerors of the world; and that even they quickly relinquished the possession, and yielded, to the valour of the inhabitants, the precarious rule of a wild and uncultivated country.