

Ravennas and the Antonine Wall

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ABSTRACT

The so-called Ravenna Cosmographer, in his description of Britain, has a very accurate section on Hadrian's Wall, providing an acceptable list of the forts, with their names, in the correct order. This is manifestly not the case with his purported list for the Antonine Wall, and it is the object of this paper to search for possible reasons for this.

INTRODUCTION: THE RAVENNA COSMOGRAPHER AND HADRIAN'S WALL

In assessing the information that the Ravenna Cosmographer provides for the Antonine Wall, it is instructive to look first at the information which he supplies for Hadrian's Wall. It might be expected that the information for the Antonine Wall would be of comparable value.

The Cosmographer lists most of the forts of Hadrian's Wall. The main sequence appears in a section in which he is consciously listing a connected list of sites (which he calls *civitates*) stretching across the country, even though he does not specifically describe the sites as lying along a Wall (unlike the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which in a similar situation uses the words *per lineam Valli*). The Cosmographer states: *iterum sunt civitates in ipsa Britannia qu(a)e recto tramite de una parte in alia, id est de oceano in oceano esistunt, hac dividunt in tercia porcione ipsam Britanniam, id est. . . .* (There are also places in Britain itself, which stand in a direct line from one part to the other, that is from ocean to ocean, and divide off a third part of Britain: these are. . . .)

There then follows this list of sites:¹

143	Serduno	Wallsend
144	Condecor	Benwell
145	Vindovala	Rudchester
146	Onno	Halton Chesters
147	Celuno	Chesters
148	Brocoliti	Carrawburgh
149	Velurtion	Housesteads
150	Esica	Great Chesters
151	Banna	Birdoswald
152	Uxelludamo	Stanwix
153	Avalana	Burgh by Sands
154	Maia	Bowness on Solway

The order is geographically correct. His source was a good one, but five of the 17 forts of Hadrian's Wall are missing from the list.

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Three of these forts are omitted because they had already been listed:

130	Magnis	Carvoran
131	Gabaglanda	Castlesteads
132	Vindolande	Chesterholm

These three names were given earlier, probably because as Rivet & Smith suggested (1979, 210), they were written to the south of the Wall on the map which the Cosmographer was using (unlike the 12 of the main sequence, which will have been written to the north). They were probably written to the south of the Wall because all three, and only these three, were actually physically detached from the Wall, Vindolanda by about a mile, the other two in each case by only a few yards. Having mentioned them once, the Cosmographer, in accordance with his almost universal practice, forebore to mention them again.

He thus lists 15 of the 17 forts of Hadrian's Wall. These 15 may be listed as follows, in their correct order, with their known or probable sizes:²

		size	
		acres	hectares
Serduno	Wallsend	4.1	1.7
Condecor	Benwell	5.64	2.2
Vindovala	Rudchester	4.5	1.8
Onno	Halton Chesters	4.3	1.7
		(original size)	
Celuno	Chesters	5.75	2.3
Brocoliti	Carrawburgh	3.5	1.4
Velurton	Housesteads	5	2.0
Vindolande	Chesterholm	3.5	1.4
Esica	Great Chesters	3	1.2
Magnis	Carvoran	3.5	1.4
Banna	Birdoswald	5.3	2.1
Gabaglanda	Castlesteads	3.75	1.5
Uxellodamo	Stanwix	9.32	3.8
Avalana	Burgh by Sands	c 4.5-5	1.8-2.0
Maia	Bowness on Solway	5.9	2.4

The two which are missing are:

Pons Aelius	Newcastle
Congavata(?)	Drumburgh

Of these, Drumburgh covers an area of about 1.96 acres (0.8 ha). For Newcastle we have no dimensions, but the limited topography of the site suggests that the fort there also measured less than about two acres. If this is correct, it may be that the Cosmographer omitted these sites simply because of their small size. With this reservation we may note that he has produced a very accurate list of the forts, in the correct order from east to west (allowing for the three listed prematurely), and apparently correct in number. Although some of the names are corrupt (notably apparently Velurton), the map in this area seems to have been plain to read, and he has not, it would seem, introduced any inappropriate or intrusive names which really belong to other features. Correlation with the *Notitia Dignitatum* confirms the identification of forts in most cases.

THE ANTONINE WALL

We might have expected a similar accuracy with the Antonine Wall, but the situation is sadly different, as Rivet & Smith (1979, 196 & 211) have now convincingly demonstrated. The section dealing with the Antonine Wall starts off bravely enough, in words echoing those used to introduce Hadrian's Wall: *iterum sunt civitates in ipsa Britannia recto tramite una alteri conexas, ubi et ipsa Britannia plus angustissima de oceano in oceano esse dinoscitur, id est. . . .*

These words make it almost certain that the Cosmographer was attempting to name structures along the Antonine Wall, and this seems to be confirmed by the fact that the first name on the list, Velunia, is certainly that of the fort at Carriden (*JRS* 47, 1957, 230 no 18) just east of the eastern end of the Wall at Bridgeness, and reasonably to be regarded as the first fort if we reckon from the east. As with Hadrian's Wall, the Cosmographer was attempting to name forts from east to west.

For convenience, the Cosmographer's list may be given here:

191	Velunia
192	Volitanio
193	Pexa
194	Begesse
195	Colanica
196	Medio Nemeton
197	Subdobiadon
198	Litana
199	Cibra
200	Credigone

It seems likely that Colanica is the place which appears as Colonia in Ptolemy, while Rivet & Smith suggest that Cibra is Ptolemy's Coria. Ptolemy places both Colonia and Coria in the central lowlands, assigning both to the Damnonii, and thus conceivably both places at least lay near the Antonine Wall.

However, whereas for Hadrian's Wall the number of forts in the list correlates perfectly with the number known on the ground (if the arguments above be accepted), for the Antonine Wall there is a great discrepancy between the Cosmographer's 10 forts and the number to which archaeology can point. Admittedly, in the case of the Antonine Wall we suffer from a deficiency which does not cripple our study of Hadrian's Wall. In the case of the latter, we can argue that, from the evidence on the ground, it was encumbered with 17 forts, no more and no less. The case of the Antonine Wall is different: we cannot point to a precise number of palpable forts distributed along its length.

The Antonine Wall was begun (as John Gillam brilliantly demonstrated: 1975) as virtually a copy of Hadrian's Wall, with large forts (large enough, that is, to hold a complete unit) at distances from each other strictly comparable with the original Hadrianic 'standard' of about seven miles, and with defended gateways at about one-mile intervals along its whole length. (It seems clear that the ditch was everywhere dug immediately afterwards.) The plan was altered even before construction had been completed: smaller forts were interspersed at about two-mile intervals, at least along some part of the length of the Wall. This was presumably to answer a need in frontier control which became apparent only after construction had begun. Sizeable bodies of men placed at frequent intervals along the line suggest a form of localized pressure from the north which differed from that encountered on Hadrian's Wall in Hadrian's reign. What

precise form this greater pressure took we can hardly say, but it seems to have been thought real enough.

If this were simply overland pressure from the north (and on the northern frontier of Britain, threat by sea clearly only became evident towards the end of the third century; before then hostility from the north was entirely land-based), it could be argued that there would be no great need for any reinforcement east of about Mumrills,³ for the Wall between there and Bridgeness faces the south shore of the Forth. However that may be, it is clear from evidence on the ground that, from at least Rough Castle westward, this reinforcement did indeed take place, and we may note the following primary and secondary forts:⁴

<i>Primary</i>	size		<i>Secondary</i>	size		known to be larger than two acres (0.8 ha)
	acres	hectares		acres	hectares	
Old Kilpatrick	4.2	1.7				1
			Duntocher	0.5	0.2	
			Castle Hill	3.2	1.3	2
			Bearsden	2.3	0.9	3
Balmuildy	4	1.6				4
			Cadder	2.8	1.1	5
			Kirkintilloch	?	?	
Auchendavy or Bar Hill	2.8 3.2	1.1 1.3				6 7
Castle Cary	3.5	1.4	Croy Hill	1.5	0.6	
			Westerwood	2		8
			[Seabegs?	?	?]	
			Rough Castle	1	0.4	
			[Falkirk?	?	?]	
Mumrills	6.5	2.6				9
			[Inveravon?	?	?]	
			[Kinneil?	?	?]	
Carriden	4	1.6				10

Even if we argue that there was only one reinforcing fort east of Castle Cary (at Rough Castle), then it is clear that we have at least 15 forts to account for. If we accept the (perhaps less probable) forts at Seabegs, Falkirk, Inveravon and Kinneil, the total is 19. But the *Cosmographer* lists only 10 putative names of Antonine Wall forts.

It would be interesting to know from whence came the number of 10. Did the map from which he was working show the line of Hadrian's Wall, with 12 little squares attached to the Wall itself, and three semi-detached little squares on the south side, all with names attached? Did the map show the Antonine Wall with only 10 little squares attached (or semi-detached⁵), the names of which he misread? If so, then it is conceivably significant that (if we leave out of account the unproven forts at Seabegs, Falkirk, Inveravon and Kinneil) there are precisely 10 forts which are known to be larger than two acres. The *Cosmographer's* map apparently marked only the forts on Hadrian's Wall which were over about two acres in size. Did it similarly mark only the 10 forts on the Antonine Wall which also exceeded two acres? The

words *recto tramite una alteri conexa* (connected with each other in a direct line) certainly suggest that on the map there was a precise line with the exact number of symbols marked, however carelessly the Cosmographer may have confused names of other places, or even tribes, with names of forts.

However, there is another possibility. It could be argued that the 10 forts of the Antonine Wall, as misnamed by the Cosmographer, represent a period when its garrisoning was much reduced from what it had been in the early years of the occupation. The excavations at Bearsden, in particular, have shown that at some forts on the Antonine Wall, there was no later occupation at all.

It is necessary to say a word here about the ‘occupations’ of the Antonine Wall. Archaeologists are, not surprisingly, keen to link discoveries on the ground with known historical events, or known historical characters. But this process needs to be carried out with great rigour if we are not to end up with historical fiction. In particular, we must not jump too readily to conclusions in attempting to relate the ‘occupations’ of Antonine Wall sites to known or supposed historical events on the northern frontier. The intensification of the occupation of the line in its very early days, attested by the small forts at about two-mile intervals, may not have lasted very long. It may have proved to be an over-reaction to the threat it was supposed to meet. It may be that there was a substantial reduction or alteration of garrisons long before the withdrawal to Hadrian’s Wall in AD 158. The archaeological levels which we glibly label ‘Antonine Wall 1’ and ‘Antonine Wall 2’ may *both*, in the case of some forts at least, lie within the period c 145–c 158, and there may have been a somewhat smaller garrison in the years just before 158.

The campaigns of Ulpus Marcellus must have further gravely reduced the capacity of the Highlanders to resume attacks (at least until a new generation of warriors grew up). If, as I have argued elsewhere, the Antonine Wall was held again from the early 180s to c 195, that occupation may indeed have been lighter still. It is to be asked whether it is not represented on the ground by the so-called ‘third occupation’ of certain forts. It may be possible to build up a picture of this putative occupation (from c 184 to c 195) from this and other sources, applying the results to the diagram (illus 1).

INSCRIPTIONS PROBABLY TO BE DATED TO THE LATE SECOND CENTURY

Castle Cary

Coh I Tungrorum and *coh I Fida Vardullorum* could have been successive garrisons within the period c 145–c 158. It could then be that the detachments of *II Augusta* and *VI Victrix* attested by *RIB* 2146 belong to the period after c 180. The date proposed for the men of *VI Victrix* in *RIB* 2148 (c 175–190) would fit this very well.

Bar Hill

Coh I Baetasiurum and *coh I Hamiorum* could have been successive garrisons within the period c 145–c 158. The detachments of *II Augusta* and *XX V.v.* attested as building (*RIB* 2171) may have been doing so after c 180.

(Less certain in date, but quite possibly late in the second century, are the altar of *coh I Baetasiurum* at Old Kilpatrick, *Britannia* I, 1970, 310–11, and the dedications by M. Cocceius Firmus at Auchendavy, *RIB* 2174–7.)

Named by Ravennas	'3rd period occupation'	Late coins	Late inscriptions
	*	*	Old Kilpatrick Duntocher Castlehill Bearsden Balmuildy
	*	*	Cadder Kirkintilloch Auchendavy
	*	*	Bar Hill Croy Hill Westerwood
	*	*	Castlecary Rough Castle Mumrills Carriden

ILLUS 1 Possible late occupation of the Antonine Wall

COINS DATING AFTER AD 158

Old Kilpatrick

Miller's report on excavations here recorded a silver coin of Lucilla (AD 164/183) which was found in a granary of the fort (Miller 1928, 34).

Cadder

A bronze coin of Marcus as Caesar, dating to AD 160, was found here, in the fort (Clarke 1933, 82).

Kirkintilloch

A 'coin of Commodus' was claimed by Dr John Buchanan (Macdonald 1918, 224).

Bar Hill

A bronze coin of Commodus found here may have been accompanied by one of Verus (Macdonald 1918, 224).

Mumrills

A bronze coin of Marcus was found, of a type dated to AD 174 (Robertson 1961, 134).

One of these coins was specifically recorded as having been found in a fort granary. The others cannot be dismissed simply because they have no precise archaeological context. They were not blown there by the wind.

THIRD OCCUPATION OF THE WALL

Although much doubted, evidence on which this has been based has been claimed at four forts. (In general, evidence is to be explained, not explained away.) It is interesting that coins dating after AD 158 have been found at three of these: Old Kilpatrick, Cadder and Mumrills. There is no evidence that this occupation belongs to the Severan period. It could belong to the reign of Commodus.

RAVENNAS

Only Velunia (or Veluniate) can be confidently assigned to the Antonine Wall. The inscription which confirms the identification with Carriden is more probably of late second century date than earlier: it was set up by a civilian named Aelius Mansuetus – a name derived from Hadrian or Antoninus Pius, but the absence of praenomen suggests a date later than their reigns.

The diagram (illus 1) collects all this evidence, and suggests a tentative identification of eight of the 10 forts which may lurk behind the entry in Ravennas. It can only be stressed how speculative this is. But it can be argued that it may be in some such way that we approach the truth of the later occupation of the Antonine Wall.

NOTES

- 1 Items in the text of Ravennas are numbered according to the more convenient system used by Crawford & Richmond 1949, 1–50.
- 2 For these see, most conveniently, Bruce 1978, the essential tool for the Wall student. The reduced size of Bowness on Solway was established by Paul Austen's recent excavations, cf. *Britannia* 20 (1989), 275.
- 3 Cf. Breeze 1979, 52.
- 4 For the sizes, cf. Robertson 1979, esp. fig 8, and Hanson & Maxwell 1983, esp. Table 8.1. For a possible fort (or fortlet?) at Falkirk, see Bailey 1991, 5–18.
- 5 Bar Hill and Carriden are not attached to the Wall. We know that the Cosmographer named Carriden in the Wall list, but had he, on the analogy of Hadrian's Wall, already named the semi-detached Bar Hill earlier in his list? (The structure now postulated at Falkirk seems also not to have been attached to the Wall: report forthcoming.)

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