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ON SOME OF THE RELATIONS OF ARCHÆOLOGY TO PHYSICAL  
GEOGRAPHY IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND.

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IN examining the monuments of ancient man we are continually reminded of the perpetual influence of natural phænomena over every stage of his social condition. Food, water, fuel,—necessary to the rudest inhabitants,—pastures, materials of building, navigable streams for commerce, required by more settled communities,—have such a dependence on physical geography, that, while marking the peculiarities of districts, we are in effect often sketching the boundaries of tribes; while tracing the courses of perpetual springs, we are following the lines of ‘aboriginal’ settlements; and often, while treading the bold edges of long chains of hills, we are on the tracks of the most ancient roads, which were easily allured to their dry open and continuous surfaces, in preference to the woody and embarrassed vales which they overlook.

Accustomed as we now are to the proud stride of the railways over broad valleys, and deep channels of the sea, and to their fearless disregard of the everlasting hills, it requires somewhat of an effort to see the importance of an insignificant ford, marsh, wood, or cliff in the days of the ‘car-borne’ Britons. Yet the effort—always worth making—must be made if we wish to restore the true idea of Cymraic, Roman, and Anglian life.

In the North of England nature shows her boldest aspect.

It is not so much that the hills are very lofty, or the rivers very large. It is rather because the groups of hills offer decided contrasts of structure, and the rivers change their character in different parts of their course. Immense surfaces of heath alternate with broad pastoral valleys,—peat mosses spread widely over ruined primæval forests—clear and perpetual springs run in lines and groups below arid ridges of limestone. What wonder then if here we find more frequently and clearly marked the sites of ancient settlements, war camps, tumuli, and roads ?

As now two railways, so a little earlier two mail-roads, and far earlier two British tracks conducted the traveller from South Britain through the sterner country of the North. This is the inevitable result of the great anticlinal ridge of stratified rocks—our Pennine Alps—thrown up from Derbyshire to the Scottish Border.—This is the 'heaven water' boundary of the river drainages ; on the west of it ran the line of road northward from Mancunium ; on the east of it the line from Eburacum ; the former nearly in the course of the North-western, the latter not greatly deviating from the North-eastern rail. Along these lines Agricola divided his troops ; these were the routes followed alike by the Pict and Scot, Plantagenet and Tudor, Cavalier and Roundhead. Wade lay on the east of these mountains, while the Stuart overran their western slopes ; and Rupert swept up the western track to surprise the besiegers of York.

There was yet a third great north and south line of ancient way running northward from Lincoln to the Humber, and thence continued towards the mouth of the Tees. This road runs near the edge of a long line of hilly ground, escarped to the west, and between it and the York "street" lies a broad vale, anciently thick with woods, and encumbered by marshes. Thus we have in the North of England three great meridional lines of road separated by a broad ridge of moorlands, and a broad marshy vale.

No part of these great lines of road is uninfluenced by the physical peculiarities of the country. The eastern lines, which are the most accurately known, appear to have been originally British ways. The Ryknield, coming from South Wales across the centre of England, strikes the Brigantian territory near Derby, and thence its continuation passes

due north, and always on the declining eastern side of the great ridge, crossing in succession all the principal streams :— as Derwent, Dun, Aire, Wharfe, Nid, Ure, Swale, Tees, Wear, and Tyne. Over some of these streams, at points of importance, as at Corbridge, the Romans constructed bridges, but generally the road crossed at permanent fords on rock, or as at St. Helen's Ford, near Tadcaster, on a scarcely varying gravel bed. The larger rivers—as Dun, Aire, Wharfe, and Ure, are crossed by this road near what was in old time the upper limit of the tide.

From Lincoln, on the Ermin Street, the line of road runs due north on the natural range of the "Cliff-hill," toward the Humber. This tide-river was crossed, where it is contracted between two bold banks, at the Ferry of Brough, and, immediately beyond this, old roads led up the brow of the wold, and continued on it to Malton. Thence roads radiated in several directions; one "street" in particular, certainly used by the Romans, led north-westward on the dry oolitic range of Hovingham (Pavement, Villa). From this "street" an old British road, perhaps the true continuation of Ermin Street, ascended the Hambleton hills, and continued along them to their extremity, entering Cleveland and reaching the mouth of the Tees and the fortification of Eston Nab. Thus, in its whole length, it is a hill-road; it has been only in part adopted by Rome.

To make connections between these three great north and south lines must be regarded as an undertaking of some difficulty. From the western to the middle line of road, a traveller might proceed from Manchester, by a devious route, through the wild and lofty region of the northern Peak, and finally emerge from the Woodland country of Sheffield, and strike the Ryknield about Templebrough. There are Roman ruins in this singular way ("Doctorgate"). Another route from Manchester is indicated as an *Iter* of Antoninus, and passes over the high country of Blackstone Edge to the valley of the Calder (Gretland, Cambodunum) and so on toward Eburacum. A third may be drawn from the Roman station at Ribchester through Craven, by Skipton to Isurium, and through Ilkley to York. Roman reliquiæ occur in this, which bears in part the very popular name of Wateling Street. None of these roads appears to have been much frequented, the communications being probably slight

between the western and eastern parts of the Brigantian Province. It was most likely the northern route, leading by the great natural hollow of Ribblesdale, which was followed by Ostorius when the Brigantian insurgents required his "intervention." Then, marching from the country of the Cangi, he carried his standards among mountains unknown to Rome. Then over broad pastures, among vast and ancient woods, roamed the wild white cattle; stag, fallow deer, roebucks, goats, rushed up the mountain sides purple with ling—a plant seldom seen by the southern soldiery—wolves and boars sought the shade of stream and cavern, and from the rocks overhead out-flew the startled eagle. Then, perhaps, from the camp of Ingleborough the few defenders gazed with wonder on an array so ominous to their country's freedom; and, as the cohorts won their way by Wharfedale and Nidderdale, some jutting crag might be the altar from which priests of a wild faith imprecated "ruin" on the leader, and "confusion" on his banners.

By the same route, almost 1500 years later, "hot Rupert" led his squadrons from friendly Lancashire, concealing his path in the forests till, from the last and most famous of these (Galtres), he burst like a thunderbolt on Fairfax and Leslie.

One other cross-road, joining the western and middle lines, must be noticed, which, like the others, follows a great natural feature. This is the famous line from Catterick toward Carlisle, which was so often traversed by the sixth legion during their 300 years of glorious occupation of Eburacum. The great depression of the summit ridge at Stainmoor, which gives passage to this road, can never have been overlooked by any people in war or peace. The Brigantes probably had a defensive station on it, as the repetition of *Rha*, in *Verteræ* and *Lavatræ*, appears to prove, and the Roman camps are more frequent in this line of road (at Catterick, Greta Bridge, Bowes, Brough, Kirby Thure, &c.) than on any part of the *Iter* farther south.

Two connections between the middle and eastern lines appear to indicate military objects; for both tend to conduct the troops from the eastern line of Lincoln obliquely across the Brigantian territory toward Carlisle. One of these, from Lincoln to Doncaster, is compelled to cross the great marshy vale; but it does so under the easiest circumstances. The

Trent is passed, near the head of tide, at Littleborough, and the route soon catches the gravelly grounds, and runs on them to Bawtry and Doncaster. By this way the legions passed from Lincoln to Eburacum. Another more northerly connection runs in a parallel direction from Brough-on-Humber by Stamford Bridge to Eburacum. Neither of these appears to be of British origin.

But a truly Brigantian road appears to have left the rising ground a little north of Isurium, to have crossed the vale of York in its narrowest part, and thus to have attained by the shortest cut the hilly ground on the eastern side, and so to have been continued to Malton and by the Wold hills to Bridlington. By this road, and the line from York by Garraby to Bridlington, connections were made from the Lancashire side right across the whole territory of the Brigantes, which extended "from sea to sea."<sup>1</sup>

From a careful study of these roads and their connections, I conclude that Eburacum was not situated on the earliest track of the middle road to the north. That track, in fact, went from near Tadcaster to Aldborough, leaving York ten miles to the right. But at the epoch of the Antonine Itinera, the direct route was abandoned, and the deviation through Eburacum (then the capital) substituted. Perhaps we may see in this that Isurium was the earlier capital of the Brigantes, and Eburacum, the later war-camp, which grew to be the imperial station.

On the whole, it appears that the lines of the earlier British roads were indicated by the great features of nature; and that for the most part the Roman ways followed and straightened the old tracks; but that in several cases military convenience was consulted by making deviations and cross cuts. The passage of rivers at natural fords, or easy ferries, is a general feature of the old roads. At these places obviously were gatherings of populations. These were points of contest as well as of commercial intercourse; use has perpetuated their use. The same Castleford and Ferry-bridge which arrested the Romans, and delayed the warriors of York and Lancaster, have given passage to our mails, and our railway carriages. The same Ath<sup>2</sup> on the Shannon which was reddened with blood in the mythical days of Erin,

<sup>1</sup> Ptolemy.

<sup>2</sup> Athlone. Ath (Erse) = Vadum = Wath (Teutonic).

was contested by the Stuart, and fortified by the engineers of Victoria.

Without doubt the use of these roads to the Romans was military and administrative. Nor must we, in reference to the wants of the British people, figure to ourselves, except on a few of them, loaded wains, or even the strings of ponies in which the Kymri still delight. But few commodities except those of local production—as the iron of Sussex—the tin of Cornwall—the salt of Worcestershire, required portage along interior roads. The “Salter’s way” commemorates this kind of traffic. The light imports of amber, glass, and bronze, were probably carried up the rivers to certain emporia,—such as Isca Silurum, and Venta Belgarum, and Isurium,—to be there exchanged for the peltry, lead, and other products of the herdsmen, foresters, and miners.

Still by reflected light we read in these roads much concerning the state of the British tribes and territory. For they connect the Roman *Stations*—and these were set close to the sites of earlier British settlements, strongholds or towns (oppidum, *Cæsar*—*πόλις*, *Ptolemy*.) At first *Præsidia*—afterwards softened to *Municipia*,<sup>3</sup> they took the names of the British towns which they overawed and defended; as Eburacum for Aber-ach—Olicana for Llecan—Cataractonium for Cathair-righ-dun, &c. Only when new stations purely military were founded, as on the line of the wall, does this etymology frequently fail—the names of these stations unconnected with native settlements being then untraceable to British roots.

It is equally remarkable and significant that these Roman *municipia* and *coloniæ* became in general the centres of Saxon and Anglian strength; and if in this day of the steam-engine their relative importance is less conspicuous, it is still a matter of English history. The Roman rule in Britain is in fact both a clue to its earlier and a guide to its later history, which it is possible to combine with another thread furnished by nature, the hills and valleys—the rocks and minerals—the rivers, the springs, the lakes, the woods.

With these ideas in our minds the land and sea acquire a new meaning for the archæologist. Through all that is present we discern much that is past; we reascend the

<sup>3</sup> Tacitus.

stream of time, and drink at the well-heads of unwritten history. From the top of a Brigantian mountain we may reanimate the busy world which has long passed away from life; the jealous boundaries of property disappear; the chimneys vanish; the thundering hammer is silent. From the midst of boundless forests of oak and pine, rise many peaks of rock or bare summits of heath, crowned with monumental stones or burial mounds. The rivers, gliding through the deepest shade, bear at intervals the light wicker boat, still frequent in Dyfed, loaded with fish, or game, or furs. On dry banks above, are the conical huts of the rude hunters, near them the not narrower houses of the dead,—perhaps not far off the cave of the wolf. Lower down the dale the richest of green pastures, covered with the fairest of cattle and the most active of horses. Still lower, the store-house of the tribe—the water-station, to which large canoes,<sup>4</sup> hollowed from the mighty oaks of Hatfield Chace, have brought from the Humber the highly prized beads and amulets, perhaps the precious bronze, which is to replace the arrow, spear and axe of stone. Returning with the boat we pass through wide marshes, and sweep rapidly with the tide to the country of the Parisoi—the men of the isles and lakes of Holderness, the ferrymen of the Humber, probably very well acquainted with the pirates of the Baltic.

Both north and south of the Humber very different scenes appear on the high and open Wold—within the memory of man many parts of these wild regions were untouched by plough, traversed by bustards, and covered with innumerable flocks. The more we reflect on the remains which crowd this region—the numerous tracks, the countless tumuli, the frequent dikes, the clearer grows the resemblance between the Yorkshire Wolds and the Downs of Wilts and Dorset. On opening the tumuli we discover similar ornaments, and, from whatever cause, consanguinity of race or analogy of employments and way of life, the earliest people must be allowed to have been very much the same along the dry chalk hills from the vicinity of Bridlington to the country of Dorchester. This is the region of the tumuli—on its surface are not unfrequent foundations of the British huts—yet we are not to suppose the main population to have been resident on these hills, or that even the flocks and herds were

<sup>4</sup> Such are dug up in several parts of the Northern river-channels.

abandoned to a free wandering upon them. This *could not be*—for these Wolds are for miles and miles naturally *dry*. But from below their edges rise innumerable bright streams, the very sight of which excites grateful thoughts to the Giver of all good—pity that such thoughts should so easily stray into idolatry—and suggests ideas of rest and rural enjoyment suited to all time and every phase of human society. By these springs no doubt were the settled habitations, the *Cyttiau* of the early Britons, followed by the Saxon *tun* and the Danish *by*; on the hills above were long boundary fences, and within these the raths and tumuli, the monumental stones and idols. In situations where nature gave particular advantages, one of the grand manufactures of the tribes was established. The fabrication of pottery, from the Kimmeridge clay about Malton, was undoubtedly very extensive in British days, and characteristic both as to substance and fashion; that of bricks and tiles at York was equally considerable in Roman days; and it is curious to walk now into the large brick-yards and potteries which are successfully conducted at these same places on the very sites which furnished the funeral urn, shaped like a *bascauda* of wicker-work, and the perforated tube which distributed air from the hypocaust.

I cannot be singular in the conviction, that in many particulars, depending on natural peculiarities and interesting to human society, the changes of race, language, and creed, have not had so great an influence as wholly to obliterate the things that were; and that among the most powerful aids to a sober and correct idea of the early state of the British people, we must count a large and considerate view of the great physical features of the country in which they lived. *Abest persona, manet res.*

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