

ART. II.—*A note on some Roman soldiers in quarries.*
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THE recent publication of *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*¹ has made it possible to see the full picture of the epigraphic evidence for the many structures on Hadrian's Wall and in the military north. Almost all of these were constructed of stone, which first, of course, had to be quarried. More than a dozen quarries² used by the Romans to construct the Wall have been identified, in several of which the soldiers had time to write their names and ranks, as at Queens Crag,³ for example, or to claim the stone as their own, as on Fallowfield Fell,⁴ or to state their unit, as near Haltwhistle Burn fortlet.⁵ The most interesting examples, however, come from Cumberland.

The most famous quarry is undoubtedly that mined by the Romans on both sides of the River Gelt. On the south bank at Pigeon Crag or Helbeck Scar a small altar was cut out of the rock and an inscription carved nearby stating that Eustus had made the altar, to which was later added the information that he belonged to *legio VI Victrix*, and even later that Amio had also had a part in making it.⁶ A group of inscriptions on the north bank of the river, which caused the place to be called the "Written Rock", includes one that can be dated to A.D. 207 and states that that part

¹ R. G. Collingwood and R. P. Wright, *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain I: Inscriptions on Stone*, Oxford, 1965.

² I. A. Richmond, *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, 12th edn., Newcastle, 1966, 33 ff.

³ *JRS* li, 1961, 194, n. 10 = *AE*, 1962, 262.

⁴ *RIB* 1442.

⁵ *RIB* 1680.

⁶ *RIB* 1016.

of the quarry was the working-face of Mercatius,⁷ and the name of this official occurs again one foot away.⁸ The fact that by that date legionaries were already at work in the quarries only $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Hadrian's Wall should be noted. It is the earliest dated inscription from Cumberland concerned with the rebuilding of the frontier system under Severus. Another mentions the century of Julius Pecularis in a detachment of *legio XX Valeria Victrix*.⁹

Many of the other inscriptions represent the scribblings in an idle moment of the troops in the work-parties engaged here, who mostly carved their own names.¹⁰ However, one does deserve special attention:¹¹ the two lines are: *vex(illatio) l<i>eg(ionis) II Aug(ustae) of(ficina) Apr(. . .) / sub Agricola optione*, "A detachment of the Second Legion Augusta; the working-face of Apr-, under Agricola, optio." Immediately above the first letter of the first line is drawn a face, which is slightly larger than the lettering. The face, which consists merely of an outline, two dots for eyes, and a straight line for the mouth, is clearly that of the NCO in charge of the party, Agricola. He, as the artist (to use the term in the loosest sense) knew, was more concerned with the quality of the stones cut than with the working-face itself, where the drawing could quickly be removed, should the need arise.

A similar interesting quarry inscription comes from Shawk,¹² 7 miles south-west of Carlisle. This consists of writing, doodling, and tallies. The writing is: *leg(ionis) II Aug(ustae) / milites pet[ras . . . /*

⁷ RIB 1009.

⁸ RIB 1010.

⁹ RIB 1014.

¹⁰ RIB 1013, 1015.

¹¹ RIB 1008. There is no doubt that the face is not a modern carving but a Roman one.

¹² RIB 1001. Two other inscriptions were found in the same place; RIB 1002 cannot be interpreted; RIB 1003 contained the name *Ianuarus Lucanu[s]*, preceded by PUPI/LABIRICNA, the former may be part of the name Pupius, the latter another name or a misspelling of *labyrinthus*, "the labyrinth of Pupius"? Cf. *JRS* lvii, 1967, 194, fig. 17.

coh(ors) III coh(ors) IIII, "Soldiers of the Second Legion Augusta (have cut) stones; the third cohort; the fourth cohort." To the left of the first line are two very simply drawn soldiers, each possessing only a head, two arms, and two legs, and perhaps there are other even rougher figures to the right. Immediately above and below the line mentioning the cohorts there is a row of strokes, cut as tallies as each of the stones was hewn; the former consists of 80 digits, the latter of 104. Above the division between the words for soldiers and stones and to the left of the third cohort are six small filled-in circles with a seventh in the middle of the group. Although it is possible that this is mere idle doodling with no meaning, it is surely quite possible that they represent the heaps of stones. The most interesting drawing is in the bottom right-hand corner and is of a man in some detail. He has large black eyes, a prominent nose, and a down-turned mouth; his arms are stretched out, bent at the elbows, and his fingers spread out; he also has large feet. Below and to the left are two marks, on which Mr R. P. Wright comments: "The marks resembling the arabic numerals 17 cannot now be interpreted." I would suggest that the former is the numeral I and the latter the centurial sign, the meaning being (*unus*) (*centurio*), "one centurion", referring to the drawing. Each of the men in the twelve centuries could congratulate himself on the fact that regardless of the number of stones he had to cut, he still had only one centurion. All centurions, as commissioned officers, had the power of flogging with the *vitis*, as in the notorious case of Lucilius, who was nicknamed "Give me another", his shout when he had broken one over a man's back.¹³ Wisely, therefore, in case any centurion saw the drawing, it remained anonymous.

¹³ Tacitus, *A.*, i 23. The drawing to the left of the centurion could be anything including the *vitis*.

Soldiers in quarries elsewhere in Cumberland were determined to leave their mark. At Coombe Crag¹⁴ they left their names; at Crowdundle¹⁵ men of *legio II Augusta* and *legio XX Valeria Victrix* left records of their names and ranks and a date that unfortunately cannot be deciphered. At Wetheral appears the declaration *Maximus scripsit*, "Maximus wrote this",¹⁶ and nearby is the statement "Condrausisius of the Twentieth Legion Valeria Victrix", followed by a drawing of a stag and the Roman numeral II;¹⁷ perhaps this is an indication of the hunting ability of Condrausisius. *Legio VI Victrix* carved an altar on the rock-face at Lodge Crag, $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles south of Milecastle 51, on which they inscribed their name in full.¹⁸ Above this someone added a line of poetry:¹⁹ *aurea per caelum volitat Victoria pennis*, "Through the sky on her wings flies golden Victory." Although such a sentiment might well come naturally to the legion whose name meant "the victorious", it is possible that the men in the quarry composed it in honour of successes earned by their comrades in fighting.

The military legal writer Tarruntenus Paternus stated that masons (*lapidarii*) were *immunes* and were thus exempted from the normal fatigues (*munera*) because of their specialist training.²⁰ They would attend to the skilful trimming of the stones and the selection of the best rock. Even so, divine help in searching for the best building material was just as much a boon in Britain as in Egypt, for example, where a soldier set up a dedication in verse c. A.D. 90:²¹

"Pan and the nymphs granted Isidorus to find these quarries in the land of Menippoeus, when a working-party of soldiers was cutting stones for a quay for our land on the orders of Mettius Rufus."

¹⁴ *RIB* 1946-52.

¹⁵ *RIB* 998-1000.

¹⁶ *RIB* 1004.

¹⁷ *RIB* 1005+6.

¹⁸ *RIB* 1953.

¹⁹ *RIB* 1954.

²⁰ *Dig.*, 50.6.7.

²¹ *IGRR* i 1152; *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*, 9, 1930, 5-10.

The hard and fatiguing task of hewing the stones was performed by those legionaries called "workers" (*munifices*). That this was not pleasant work can be seen from the undisguised delight of Apollinarius, when he was appointed as a clerk in his legion and thus became an *immunis* who was exempt from work in the quarries to provide the stones for the new road systems of Arabia. In a letter to his father Sabinus dated to 27 March, A.D. 107, he says:²²

"Things are going well for me here. Thanks to Sarapis I got here quite safely and while the others the whole day long are cutting stones and are engaged on other tasks, I so far have suffered none of this."

In a letter to his mother Tasoucharion dated to 19 February, A.D. 108, he writes:²³

"I give thanks to Sarapis and Good Fortune that while everyone is toiling away the whole day through cutting stones, I, as an NCO, walk around doing nothing."

Similarly, when a vexillation of *legio XIII Gemina* was toiling in the reign of Caracalla in a quarry at Micia in Dacia, Aurelius Arimus set up an altar on which he proudly showed that he did not have to take part in the work because he was *immuni[s]*.²⁴

There are several instances throughout the Empire where Roman soldiers have recorded their feelings in an idle moment in a boring or fatiguing job, but none in this country more interesting than the comments of the troops in Cumberland, many of whom must have had the same attitude to the work as the man at Coombe Crag who wrote *Daminius nolui*, "I, Daminius, did not want to do it."²⁵

²² *P. Mich.* 466.

²³ *P. Mich.* 465. The context of this letter seems to me to make far better sense if it is later than 466. I therefore date it to A.D. 108 and not 107 as the editors do.

²⁴ III 12566. For bad working conditions for Roman soldiers in a mine cf. Tacitus, *A.*, xi 20.

²⁵ *RIB* 1952.