

ART. II – *Petillius Cerialis in Carlisle: a numismatic contribution*

By D. C. A. SHOTTER

THE twentieth century has seen much academic effort being put into trying to establish a chronology for the Roman conquest of northern Britain; for a long time it was assumed that the key-figure in the process was Gnaeus Julius Agricola, who was governor of the province either in A.D. 78-84 or, more likely, in A.D. 77-83. It has also been assumed that the period of his governorship saw Roman arms advance from Cheshire to the Moray Firth; the dominant role played by Tacitus, Agricola's son-in-law, in the source-tradition has undoubtedly helped to encourage such a view.

It is not entirely new, however, for anxiety to be expressed at the notion that Agricola could have achieved so much; in 1968, Barri Jones¹ effectively opened up the debate when he wrote that "Agricolan" was a much overused adjective, although voices had in fact been raised earlier. For example, as early as 1913, J. P. Bushe-Fox² recognised the possibility of "pre-Agricolan indicators" amongst the samian pottery from Carlisle, and the possibility of a pre-Agricolan phase at Carlisle was canvassed again by Ogilvie and Richmond in their edition of Tacitus' biography of Agricola.³ Now, however, timbers from the south gateway of the earliest fort at Carlisle (in the area of Annetwell Street) have provided a felling-date of late in A.D. 72;⁴ in other words, a permanent Roman military presence was established at Carlisle as early as the governorship of Quintus Petillius Cerialis (A.D. 71-74).⁵

Similarly, work over the past thirty years or so has established that some forts in the north-west were initiated later than Agricola's governorship – for example, most of those in the Lake District.⁶ Other locations, on the other hand, probably experienced the Roman army on "search-and-destroy" missions, launched both overland and from the sea, as pre-Flavian governors tried to maintain stability in the factional politics of the *Brigantes*;⁷ this attempt finally collapsed with Venutius' victory over Cartimandua in A.D. 69, thus precipitating an urgent necessity on the Roman side for the full conquest of northern Britain.

It can thus be seen that, far from being the inspirational work of one governor, the conquest of northern Britain was a lengthy affair, which took most of the time from Nero's to Hadrian's reign to complete.⁸ In view of this, it becomes more crucial than ever to establish criteria by which fort-initiations of different dates can be distinguished. It is the purpose of the present paper to utilise the coin-evidence from the two sites in north-west England (Carlisle and Ribchester), which are now known to date from Cerialis' governorship, in an attempt to formulate a "coin-profile" for a Cerialian site.

Carlisle has yielded in excess of two thousand Roman coins – the largest sample for any site in north-west England, including Chester. A major difference, however, between these two sites lies in the fact that, whereas a great many of Chester's Roman coins derive from antiquarian reports of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, most of those recorded from Carlisle have come from controlled excavations on a variety of sites over the last thirty years. Carlisle's antiquarian

tradition in respect of Roman coins has been less strong, consisting mostly, as it does, of individual coins reported in local newspapers and collected together by the late Dorothy Charlesworth.⁹ Only one more substantial collection exists: in the mid-1970s, papers belonging to Thomas Dalzell, who lived in Lancaster before moving to Workington, were “rediscovered” in Lancaster City Museum.¹⁰ These papers contained records of Roman coins found in Carlisle in the 1850s and 1860s, and the information provided has enabled a number of them to be identified in Lancaster City Museum’s collection of previously-unprovenanced Roman coins. The only problem resided in the idiosyncratic nature of many of the coins; for a large number of them were pre-Flavian *aes* – issues and regular issues of the later third century – both periods for which Roman coin-finds are normally rare on sites in north-west England. Thus, although the pre-Flavian issues, if genuine, would be very supportive of arguments to be advanced in this paper, it has been decided not to make use of them (except to indicate their contents in summary form).¹¹

The locations of excavation areas in Carlisle have been widely dispersed, although for the present purpose they will be arranged in two groups – 1, comprising sites close to the known fort area (Annetwell Street, Castle Street, Abbey Street, The Cathedral, Tullie House and BBC Radio Cumbria), and 2 (all other sites, but principally Blackfriars Street and The Lanes).¹²

1. The sites in the vicinity of the forts area

a) *Pre-Flavian coinage*

The bulk of the pre-Flavian coins found on these sites are *denarii* of the Republic and of Marcus Antonius; neither are inextricably associated with pre-Flavian loss, although they are presumably more likely to have been lost in pre-Flavian or early Flavian times than later. However, the superior silver content of *denarii* minted before the Neronian reform of A.D. 64 made these a target for Trajan’s recall of “old silver” in c.A.D. 107.¹³ As a result of this, therefore, although such coins continued to circulate in the late-first and early-second centuries, they are not normally found in contexts later than early Hadrianic.¹⁴ The *denarii* of Marcus Antonius, on the other hand, survived in circulation longer – until the demise of the *denarius* in the middle of the third century A.D. – in the mistaken belief that their silver content was inferior.¹⁵ Similarly, silver coins issued after the Neronian reform might also persist in circulation until the mid-third century, although they too tended to disappear from circulation as the decline of the silver content of the *denarius* accelerated. Although this is true also in principle of “civil war” *denarii* (A.D. 68-69), their smaller numbers obviously contrived to make them somewhat less resilient.

More helpful is the *aes*-coinage; although the circulation of this does not appear to have been “artificially” interfered with by legislation, the irregular minting programmes of the Julio-Claudian emperors, in contrast with the enhanced organisation found under the Flavians (especially Vespasian), led to a situation where the *aes*-coinage of the latter rapidly “swamped” that of the former. Unlike the silver coinage, the *aes*-denominations easily sustained wear (even in a short period), so that we should not generally expect pre-Flavian *aes* to survive in circulation long

into the Flavian period. Thus, although such coinage cannot be regarded as diagnostic of early Flavian activity in an absolute sense, it should be expected to be found more frequently in the early Flavian period than later.

As it is, there is relatively little pre-Flavian coinage from this group of sites; besides the seventeen Republican *denarii* (a high number in itself), there are two *aes*-issues and a “post-reform” *denarius* of Nero, together with a *denarius* of Vitellius.

b) *Flavian coins*

A second criterion should be provided by the chronological distribution of coins of the Flavian emperors, of which this group of sites has produced nearly 150. They are divided chronologically as follows:

A.D. 69-73	54
74-76	3
77-79	33
no date	25
79-81	1
81-83	–
84	–
85	2
86	13
87	1
88-89	1
90-96	2
no date	11

Thus, the coins of Vespasian and Titus are proportionately distributed as follows:

69-73	46.55%
74-76	2.59
77-79	28.45
(Vespasian) no date	21.65
79-81	0.86

With regard to the distribution of the coins of Vespasian, we have to bear in mind that a characteristic of minting is demonstrated here – namely that coins of A.D. 69-73 (especially 71) and of A.D. 77-79 are considerably more prolific than those of A.D. 74-76. However, despite the heaviness of the minting of the early coins, it is reasonable to assume that this factor would not have been so clearly demonstrated had not the site been occupied at that time. It seems unlikely that so high a proportion of coins of the early 70s would have been residual in circulation until the late 70s.

Further, the fact that the low number of coins of Vespasian’s middle years reflects minting, and should not necessarily be taken to indicate a slackening of activity under Frontinus, should also be noted. It is also fair to point out that 20% of Vespasian’s coins could not be assigned to a year-of-issue. Although Robertson¹⁶ has argued, in the case of Scottish sites, that a combination of coins of A.D. 71 and 77-78 points to Agricola activity, the appearance of this phenomenon at Carlisle (and

probably at Scottish sites, too) would more naturally suggest that, whilst Agricola may have been in occupation at Carlisle, he did not establish it. In other words, the preponderance of early coins of Vespasian can be regarded as confirming the results of dendrochronology.

It should also be noted that, whilst the degree of wear sustained by these coins cannot always be adequately assessed, and whilst the application of a time-period to wear can be only the most subjective of “tests”, the fine state of preservation of many of the coins from Annetwell Street allows us to see that many of the early *aes*-issues had suffered little wear prior to loss. *Aes*-coinage will have worn in circulation very quickly; thus, it is difficult to imagine that little-worn coins of the early 70s will have been lost beyond the middle years of the decade; indeed, they were probably lost soon after receipt.

c) *Denominational distribution of Flavian coins*

A further test that can be applied to a group of coins of significant size concerns the “unit-value” that they represent (as expressed in *asses*), and the percentage that is made up of *denarii*; the coins may be shown in denominational distribution thus (with *aurei* excluded):

	<i>Denarius</i>	<i>Sestertius</i>	<i>Dupondius</i>	<i>As</i>	Total	‘ <i>As</i> -value’
Vespasian	11	8	34	62	115	338
Titus	–	1	–	–	1	4
Domitian	4	5	8	13	30	113
Totals	15	14	42	75	146	455
	“ <i>As</i> -value” per coin		% <i>Denarii</i>			
Vespasian	2.94		9.57			
Titus	4.00		–			
Domitian	3.77		13.33			
Overall	3.17		10.27			

These figures can be further subdivided to highlight the characteristics of periods within the reigns of Vespasian and Titus:

	“ <i>As</i> -value” per coin		% <i>Denarii</i>
	(All coins)	(<i>Aes</i>)	
A.D. 69-73	2.65	1.58	7.41
74-76	9.00	2.00	50.00
77-79	2.18	1.75	3.03
No date	3.56	1.19	16.00
79-81	4.00	4.00	–

The figures presented here serve to highlight, through the low value of each coin (as expressed in *asses*), the preponderance of the *as* itself in the coinage of the Flavians (particularly of Vespasian). By comparison with other sites in northern Britain, the “wealth-indicators” for Carlisle are low. This perhaps points to two conclusions: first that the site was used at first by auxiliaries rather than by legionaries, and secondly that the preponderance of the *as* emphasises the early

foundation of the site – at a period when the *as* dominated *aes* coin issue. As far as concerns the garrison, recently published evidence has suggested that a unit of auxiliary cavalry – the *Ala Sebosiana* – was at the fort at least during the period of Agricola’s governorship.¹⁷ Indeed, its earlier presence on the Rhine¹⁸ suggests that it may have been a unit brought to Britain by Cerialis himself, following his command in the Gallo-German uprising of A.D. 69-70.

2. The other sites in Carlisle

This group includes a wide variety of sites, sometimes situated at considerable distances from the known fort, and including some with no obvious military associations. Also included in this group are casual finds which have been reported over the years from a diversity of locations.

a) *Pre-Flavian coinage*

This group is again dominated by Republican *denarii*, of which there are fifteen; besides these, there is a *sestertius* of Tiberius, together with two *aurei*, a *dupondius*, two *asses* and a *semis* of Nero. Thus, the pre-Flavian *aes*- issues bulk marginally larger than on the sites comprising “Group 1”, although it is possible that since some of the Neronian coins are unprovenanced casual finds, they may have come from locations in “Group 1”.

b) *Flavian coins*

The pattern of early Flavian coinage is less easy to discuss, since forty coins of Vespasian cannot be assigned to a specific year-of-issue; in a considerable number of cases, however, this is due to the fact that the coins concerned exhibit a considerable degree of wear.

A.D. 69-73	20
74-76	6
77-79	18
no date	40
79-81	2
81-84	–
85	1
86	5
87	1
88-89	–
90-96	4
no date	8

The coins of Vespasian and Titus are thus distributed proportionately as follows:

A.D. 69-73	23.26%
74-76	6.98
77-79	20.93
no date	46.51
79-81	2.32

Because of the large number of coins of Vespasian, for which issue-dates are not available, it is hardly possible to distinguish between the incidence of earlier and later issues. Despite the large number of undated coins, however, the earlier issues are slightly more numerous, perhaps reflecting residuality in circulation from the early years of Vespasian's reign. Even so, it occasions no surprise that the superiority of earlier over later coins of Vespasian is much more marked on sites with an obvious military connection. This would suggest that the strong loss of early coins of Vespasian on the "military sites" derives from factors connected with occupation rather than coin-circulation. Otherwise, the similarity between the sites of Groups 1 and 2 would have been more marked.

c) *Denominational distribution of Flavian coins*

	<i>Denarius</i>	<i>Sestertius</i>	<i>Dupondius</i>	<i>As</i>	Total	' <i>As</i> - value'
Vespasian	16	9	15	42	82	364
Titus	1	1	–	–	2	20
Domitian	2	2	2	15	21	59
Flavian	1	1	–	1	3	21
Totals	20	13	17	58	108	464

	" <i>As</i> - value" per coin	% <i>Denarii</i>
Vespasian	4.44	19.51
Titus	10.00	50.00
Domitian	2.81	9.52
Overall	4.30	18.52

	" <i>As</i> - value" per coin (All coins) (<i>Aes</i>)		% <i>Denarii</i>
A.D. 69-73	5.89	1.23	31.58
74-76	11.00	1.00	66.67
77-79	3.29	1.60	11.76
no date	2.92	1.83	7.69
79-81	10.0	4.0	50.00

Using the evidence of coin-loss, therefore, we may distinguish three criteria, which may separately or collectively provide an indication of sites established during the governorship of Petillius Cerialis:

- 1) The presence of a certain volume of pre-Flavian coinage, of which *aes*- issues are more diagnostic than silver;
- 2) In the coinage of Vespasian, a clear predominance of issues of A.D. 69-73 over later issues;
- 3) A relatively low "wealth-rating", because of the greater predominance of the *as* over other denominations in the early than in the later 70s.

The only other site at which dendrochronological analysis has been applied is Ribchester.¹⁹ Timbers taken from the excavations of 1989-90 were not so well preserved as those from Annetwell Street, Carlisle. However, although the results

were more equivocal, they contained a suggestion that occupation at this site, too, was pre-Agricolan in date. We thus have an opportunity to apply the numismatic criteria derived from Carlisle to see if they offer confirmation to the proposition that Ribchester could have been a Cerialian establishment. The coin-loss sample from this site is considerably smaller than that from Carlisle, but exhibits similar characteristics, apart from the fact that a smaller proportion of its coin-sample derives from controlled excavations.

a) *Pre-Flavian coinage*

Twenty-six such coins are on record, although a number of them derive from antiquarian reports:²⁰

Republic	12	AR
Augustus	2	AR; AE (As)
Tiberius	1	AR
Caligula	1	AE (As)
Claudius	2	AE (<i>Sestertius</i> ; As)
Nero	6	AV; AR; AE (4: Dupondius; 3 Asses)
Galba	1	AR
Vitellius	1	AR

Thus, Ribchester is better represented in pre-Flavian coinage (both *denarii* and *aes*-issues) than is Carlisle. This might even suggest the possibility of military activity at the site prior to Cerialis' governorship. The line of the river Ribble may well have been put to use as Rome tried to grapple with Brigantian factional politics as early as the reign of Nero²¹ and/or during the governorship of Vettius Bolanus (A.D. 69-71), when the "Brigantian crisis" came to a head.²²

b) *Flavian coins*

The usual problems exist over the precise chronological placement of a number of the coins:

A.D. 69-73	25
74-76	5
77-79	7
no date	37
79-81	4
81-83	—
84	2
85	—
86	7
87	2
88-89	—
90-96	3
no date	16
Unidentified Flavian, 69-96	3

The proportional distribution of coins of Vespasian and Titus is thus:

A.D. 69-73	32.05%
74-76	6.41
77-79	8.97
no date	47.44
79-81	5.13

Despite the large number of chronologically-unplaced coins, it is difficult to believe that their distribution would have seriously “upset” the existing proportional balance between early and late coins of Vespasian.

c) *Denominational distribution of Flavian coins*

	<i>Denarius</i>	<i>Sestertius</i>	<i>Dupondius</i>	<i>As</i>	Total	' <i>As</i> - value'
Vespasian	14	4	7	49	74	303
Titus	3	—	—	1	4	49
Domitian	6	5	6	13	30	141
Flavian	—	—	—	3	3	3
Totals	23	9	13	66	111	496

	" <i>As</i> - value" per coin	% <i>Denarii</i>
Vespasian	4.09	18.92
Titus	12.25	75.00
Domitian	4.70	20.00
Overall	4.47	20.72

	" <i>As</i> - value" per coin		% <i>Denarii</i>
	(All coins)	(<i>Aes</i>)	
A.D. 69-73	4.5	1.47	20.83
74-76	16.00	—	100.00
77-79	1.71	1.71	—
no date	2.35	1.15	8.11
79-81	12.25	1.00	75.00

Although the “indicators of wealth are a little higher at Ribchester than at Carlisle, which might point to a higher level of legionary involvement at the former, a broad similarity exists in the profiles of early coinage at the two sites. We may, therefore, with some confidence postulate that the three criteria indicated above provide valid expectations of the coin-profile of a military site established at least as early as the governorship of Petillius Cerialis, and that they may, therefore, be applied to other sites.

Notes and References

¹ G. D. B. Jones, “The Romans in the North-west”, *Northern History* III (1968), 1-26.

² J. P. Bushe-Fox, “The use of Samian Pottery in dating the Early Occupation of the North of Britain”, *Archaeologia* LXIV (1913), 295-314.

- ³ R. M. Ogilvie and I. A. Richmond, *Cornelii Taciti De Vita Agricolae* (Oxford, 1967), 55, 206.
- ⁴ See *Britannia* XXI (1990), 320; also M.R. McCarthy, *Carlisle: History and Guide* (Stroud, 1993), 3.
- ⁵ A. R. Birley, "Petillius Cerialis and the Conquest of Brigantia", *Britannia* IV (1973), 179-90.
- ⁶ D. C. A. Shotter, *Romans and Britons in North-West England?* (Lancaster, 1997), 29ff.
- ⁷ D. C. A. Shotter, "Rome and the Brigantes: Early Hostilities", *CW2*, xciv, 21-34.
- ⁸ See D. C. A. Shotter, "The Roman Conquest of the North-West", *CW2*, c, 33-53.
- ⁹ D. Charlesworth, "Roman Carlisle", *Arch. Journ.* CXXXV (1978), 115-37.
- ¹⁰ D. C. A. Shotter, "Roman Coins from Carlisle", *CW2*, lxxviii, 201-6; also S. H. Penney, "The Dalzell Collection", *Contrebis* V (1977), 23-6.
- ¹¹ The recorded coins which would be relevant to the present discussion are: Republican 1, Augustus 4, Tiberius 3, Caligula 3, Claudius 5, Nero 7, Galba 3, Vitellius 1. There is also one issue of Titus (as Caesar) of A.D. 72, one of Domitian (as Caesar) of A.D. 80-1, and five of Domitian (as emperor); of these, one was issued in 81, two in 85, one in 86, and one in 90-1.
- ¹² Of the sites in "Group 1", the excavations at Castle Street and Abbey Street have been published see M. R. McCarthy, *Roman Waterlogged Remains and later Features at Castle Street, Carlisle: Excavations, 1981-82* (Kendal, 1991); I. D. Caruana, D. C. A. Shotter and E. J. E. Pirie, "Roman and Medieval Coins found during Sewer Renewal in Carlisle, 1983-87", *CW2*, xciv, 65-76. Of those in "Group 2", the excavations at Blackfriars Street and the Southern Lanes have been published – see M. R. McCarthy, *A Roman, Anglian and Medieval Site at Blackfriars Street* (Kendal, 1990); *Roman and Medieval Carlisle: The Southern Lanes: Excavations 1981-2* (Carlisle, 2000). (Reports are awaited for the sites at Annetwell Street, Tullie House, BBC Radio Cumbria, The Lanes, Scotch Street, and The Cathedral).
- ¹³ Dio Cassius 68. 15, 3.
- ¹⁴ R. Reece, "Numerical Aspects of Roman Coin Hoards in Britain", in P. J. Casey and R. Reece (eds.), *Coins and the Archaeologist* (Oxford, 1974), (*BAR* 4), 78-94.
- ¹⁵ Pliny *Natural History* XXXIII. 132
- ¹⁶ A. S. Robertson, "Roman Coins found in Scotland, 1971-82", *PSAS* CXIII (1983), 405-48 esp. 418. It is worth comparing coin-loss at Middlewich (Cheshire), which has coins of A.D. 71-3, but none of A.D. 77-8 (D. C. A. Shotter, "Middlewich: The Evidence of Roman Coin Loss", *Chester Arch. Journal*, LXXV (1998-9), 51-60; also "Petillius Cerialis in Northern Britain", *Northern History*, xxxvi (2000), 189-98).
- ¹⁷ See *Tab. Luguval.* 44; R. S. O. Tomlin, "Roman Manuscripts from Carlisle: The ink-written Tablets", *Britannia* XXIX (1998), 31-84 (esp. 74 f.). Legionaries perhaps came to Carlisle after the battle of *Mons Graupius*: see R. S. O. Tomlin, "The Twentieth Legion at Wroxeter and Carlisle", *Britannia* XXIII (1992), 141-158.
- ¹⁸ Tacitus *Histories* III. 6; see D. C. A. Shotter and A. J. White, *The Roman Fort and Town of Lancaster* (Lancaster, 1990), 27.
- ¹⁹ Publication of sites in Ribchester continues: see B. J. N. Edwards and P. V. Webster, *Ribchester Excavations* (Cardiff, 1985-); for the most recent excavations see K. M. Buxton and C. L. E. Howard-Davis, *Bremetenacum: Excavations at Roman Ribchester, 1980, 1989-90* (Lancaster, 2000).
- ²⁰ W. T. Watkin, *Roman Lancashire* (Liverpool, 1883), 162-3; J. Garstang, *Roman Ribchester* (Preston, 1898).
- ²¹ See D. C. A. Shotter, "Rome and the Brigantes: Early Hostilities", *CW2*, xciv, 21-34.
- ²² Statius, *Silvae* V. 2, 140-51.

