

Civil Government in the North: the Carvetii, Brigantes and Rome

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THE discovery of the Langwathby milestone (Edwards and Shotter, 2005), providing the third reference to the *civitas Carvetiorum*, draws attention to the civil administration of the frontier areas of Roman Britain, a subject rarely considered. Partly, this is because of the relative lack of evidence within the province. Yet inscriptions, literary sources and some archaeological evidence enable us to identify and locate some cities and their territories. Further, as Britain was part of an empire with a broadly uniform administrative framework, evidence by analogy can be used to illuminate our relative gloom. The purpose of this paper is to consider the evidence for civilian administration in the northern frontier area within its empire-wide framework. It is possible to demonstrate that a pattern of cities existed in northern Britain, interspersed with military land, and, to some extent, map their territories. It is probable that Carlisle was the city of the *Carvetii*, with an extensive territory, Corbridge possibly the city of the *Votadini*, while a further city may have lain in the Tees Valley, restricting the Brigantes to the Vale of York and south-west Yorkshire. There is some knowledge of the officials of these cities, a senator and quaestor of the *Carvetii*, and an aedile of the *Parisii*, indicating that the cities were governed in the normal way. It is a particularly appropriate that this lecture was given in honour of Dorothy Charlesworth in view of her work at Carlisle.

The nature of Roman administration

The Roman empire was divided into provinces, each containing cities. In theory, each city was independent and throughout most of the Early Empire they were self governing, running their own affairs and raising taxes for themselves and for the central government. In the north-western provinces of the empire, these cities largely developed from the earlier tribes. Under Rome, an urban centre was established and the former tribal territory allocated to it. The modern term ‘*civitas* capital’ has been coined to describe the urban centre of the new city and its territory, but it is a misnomer: to Rome, urban and rural areas were one: they were the ‘city’, the *civitas*.

Nevertheless, the difference between the urban and rural elements of the city was recognised. The urban area was named the *oppidum*. It was divided into wards, each termed a *vicus*, and whose inhabitants were called *vicani*. The rural territory was divided into districts, each called a *pagus*. The term *vicus* had other meanings; it could refer to a village or to an alley. Each city had two senior magistrates, *duoviri*, and two junior magistrates, *aediles*, with two more, *quaestores*, being in charge of financial matters. The town council, *ordo*, contained up to 100 senators, *decuriones*.

On the northern frontier, we have evidence for *civitates*, that is cities, *vici* and other administrative units, and officials (see Shotter, 2004, 2-6; 111-3 for a recent review of the evidence for tribes, *civitates* and their locations). The basic sources for the study of civil government in Britain are the publications of John Mann (Mann, 1960; 1961; 1963; 1966 and 1996a and b). The geographical sources are conveniently collected in A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1980).

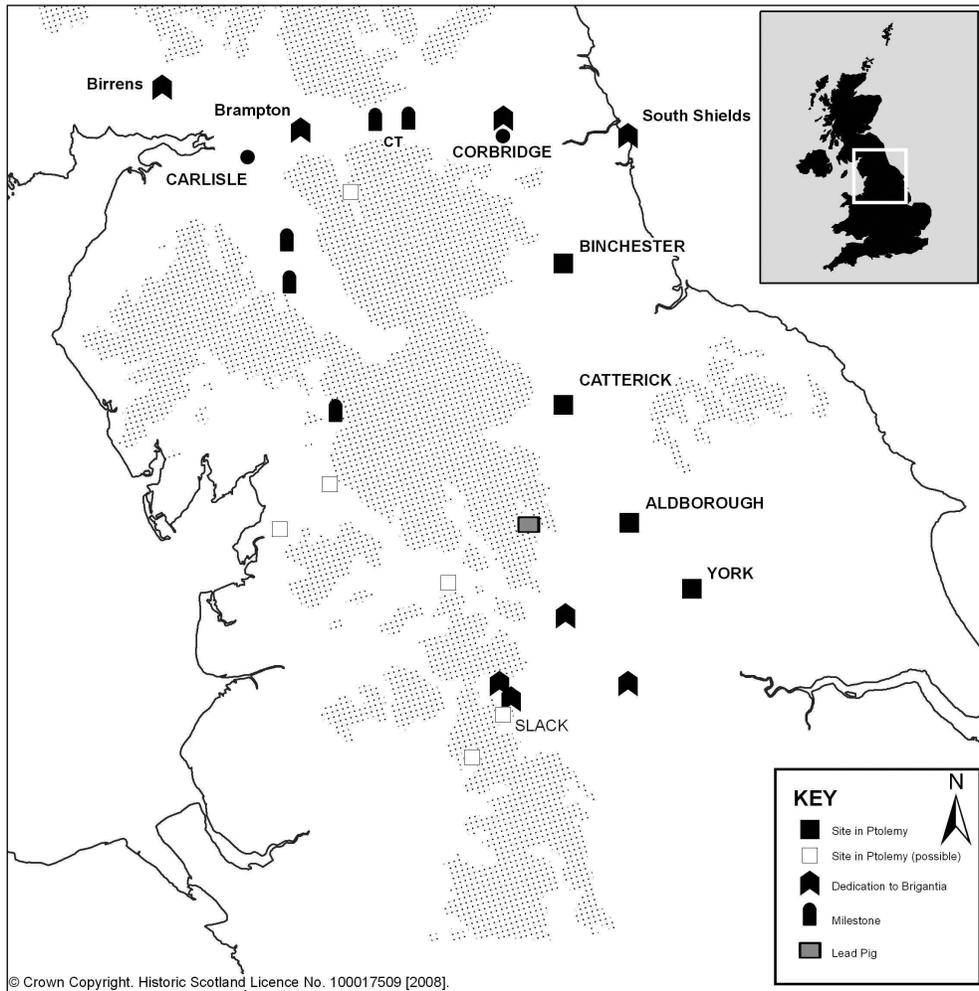


FIG. 1. Map of north Britain showing the location of places mentioned in the text.

The Brigantes

An essential first step is to try to define the location of each *civitas*. The *Brigantes* appear in several of our sources (Clark, 1939; see Shotter, 2007 for the latest review of the evidence). Tacitus states that the *Brigantes* were the most numerous tribe in Britain

(*Agricola* 17, 2). The second-century geographer Ptolemy, writing about 140 A.D. provides the most evidence:

Again below the *Selgovae* and the *Otadini*, stretching from sea to sea, are the *Brigantes*, in whom are these cities: *Epiacum*, *Vinnovium* (Binchester), *Caturactonium* (Catterick), *Calagum*, *Isurium* (Aldborough), *Rigodunum*, *Olicana*, *Eboracum* (York) Legion VI Victrix, *Camunlodunum* (*Geographia* II, 3, 10).

In the section on the west coast:

‘*Moricambe* estuary, harbour of the *Setantii*, *Belisama* estuary’ (*Geographia* II, 3, 2).

In the section on the east coast:

‘gulf of the *Gabrantovices* suitable for a harbour’ (*Geographia* II, 3, 4).

On the basis of these few references several conclusions have been drawn. Firstly, it has been suggested that the *Brigantes* were a federation (Richmond, 1954; Rivet and Smith, 1980, 471-2). This is based on apparent references to other groups within their territory, in particular the *Setantii*, who lay on the west coast somewhere in modern Lancashire, and, on the east coast, the *Gabrantovices*, both mentioned by Ptolemy, supplemented by the inscription referring to the *curia Textoverdorum* and the area which may be known as *Contrebis* around Lancaster (Edwards, 1971, 17; Birley, 1986, 67; Higham, 1987; Higham, 1986, 146-7 places the *Setantii* in Furness). These, however, are chance survivals, difficult to interpret. Some could be formerly independent groups of people swept up in the Brigantian state but with their names surviving, others later subdivisions; since we cannot define precisely the extent of Brigantian territory, some may always have been independent. The inference drawn from these references that the *Brigantes* were a federation containing several septs is merely a modern assumption (see Edwards and Shotter, 2005, 66 for words of caution).

The second item of supporting evidence cited by those who see the *Brigantes* as a federation is the wide ranging nature of their territory, which, it is argued, could not have been held together in a unitary state by an Iron Age chief. This ignores the evidence from southern Britain where one kingdom appears to have held sway over its neighbours covering a similar area to the *Brigantes*. In any case, it is an assumption with no support.

Thirdly, the reference by Tacitus to a queen of the *Brigantes*, Cartimandua, and her consort, Venutius, has been read as a dynastic marriage linking different parts of a federation (*Histories*, 3.45; *Annals* 12.32.2-3; for discussion of the early Roman relationship with the *Brigantes* see Hanson and Campbell, 1986). This again is an assumption for which there is no evidence.

In summary, there is no reason to believe that the *Brigantes* did not stretch across north Britain as Tacitus stated and formed a unitary state. However, it is difficult to use Ptolemy’s evidence to support such a statement. Only four of the nine place-names in his list can definitely be assigned to specific locations. These all lie to the east of the Pennines: Binchester in County Durham, Catterick, Aldborough and York in Yorkshire.

The locations of the others are not known and have been tentatively assigned to forts situated in the Pennines (Slack, Elslack and Castleshaw) or the north-west (Lancaster or Burrow-in-Lonsdale and Whitley Castle). These attributions depend upon their latitude and longitude as detailed in Ptolemy's list and their location in the *Antonine Itinerary*, a road list dating to the early third century. Nevertheless, although we cannot locate all these place names, and cannot be certain of any west of the Pennines, a reading of Ptolemy's evidence at face-value would support the territory of the tribe extending into the western areas of northern Britain.

The dedications to the goddess *Brigantia* which occur across northern Britain have been used to attempt to plot the extent of the tribal territory. Some of the dedications – those at Castleford, Greetland and Adel together with the dedication to *Bregantes* at Slack (*RIB* 628, 627, 629 and 623) – lie within or close to the tribal territory as plotted by Ptolemy. Others were erected well beyond this core territory. These include a dedication each by a centurion of the Sixth Legion at Corbridge and an *architectus*, and therefore probably a soldier of the same legion, at Birrens and, in 212 or 213, by an imperial procurator in the neighbourhood of Brampton by Hadrian's Wall (the location is not certain and the inscription now lost), while the status of the dedicator of the altar at South Shields is not known, though the single name suggests that he was an ordinary soldier or civilian (*RIB* 1131, 2091, 2066 and 1053). All four are military sites, far removed from the core area of the *Brigantes* and it is possible that worship of the goddess may have accompanied the army north (Clark, 1939, 85). The dedication by the procurator stands out on two counts: the senior rank of the official and the dedication to the nymph *Brigantia* which may imply that she is a local goddess (*ibid.*). If any weight is attached to these points, the altar is the best evidence for the proposal that the territory of the *Brigantes* stretched as far north as Tyne-Solway isthmus.

The *Antonine Itinerary* (*Iter V*) includes the place *Isurbrigantum* between *Eburacum* (York) and *Cataractonum* (Catterick). This is Aldborough and the nature of the full name, *Isurium Brigantum* has been taken to demonstrate that Aldborough was the *oppidum* of the city of the *Brigantes*. It would appear that the *civitas Brigantum* had been created by the early 3rd century at the latest.

We may also note the two pigs of lead dating to 81 bearing the letters BRIG found near lead workings near Heyshaw Moore, Dacre Bank, Pateley Bridge, about 18 miles (30km) west of Aldborough (*RIB* II 2402.1 and 2404.2; they are from the same die, so the letters BRI may be restored with confidence in the first example). The early date is noteworthy and implies that a Brigantian political entity was in existence: might this have been the *civitas*, bearing in mind that earlier dates have been suggested for the establishment of other British *civitates*?

In summary, much of the evidence for the *Brigantes* 'converges on Western Yorkshire, especially South-West Yorkshire' (Clark, 1939, 83). Beyond this core area, Ptolemy recorded *Vinnovium*/Binchester in southern County Durham as being within the territory of the *Brigantes*, as well as unidentified places elsewhere. The territory may have stretched as far north as the Tyne Valley and into Cumbria: the four dedications to the goddess *Brigantia* in the vicinity of Hadrian's Wall may support this contention, but

they are 100 miles (160km) from the core area (see Hanson and Campbell, 1986, 82-3 for comment on the southern boundary). Other than that, we can only note the assertion of Ptolemy that the tribe stretched from sea to sea and hope that in time the unlocated place names are identified. Finally, we should note that the extent of the territory of the *civitas* may not have coincided with that described by Tacitus and Ptolemy.

The Carvetii

The evidence for the *civitas Carvetiorum* is restricted to the north-west of Britain and consists of the following:

RIB 933 (Old Penrith): *D(is) M(anibus) Fl(avio) Martio sen(atori) in c(ivitate) Carvetioru(um) questorio vixit an(nos) XXXXV Martiola filia et heres ponen[dum] curavit.*

‘To the spirits of the departed (and) to Flavius Martius, a councillor in the city of the Carvetii, of quaestorian rank, who lived 45 years. Martiola his daughter and heiress set this up’.

JRS 55 (1965) 224, no. 11 (Frenchfield): *Imp(eratori) Caes(ari) Mar(co) Casiano Latinianio Postimo Aug(usto) Pio Felici R(es) P(ublica) C(ivitas) Car(vetiorum).*

‘To the Emperor Caesar Marcus Cassianus Latinus Postumus Augustus Pius Felix, the commonwealth of the city of the Carvetii (*set this up*)’ (258-268).

Britannia 36 (2005) 482, no. 11 (Langwathby): *Imp(eratori) Caes(ari) M(arco) Aur(elio) Sev(ero) Alexandro P(io) F(elici) Aug(usto) Pont(ifici) Max(imo) Trib(unicia) P(otestate) II Co(n)s(uli) P(ro)co(n)s(uli) P(atri) P(atriciae) c(ivitas) Car(vetiorum) Lug(uvalio) m(ilia) p(assuum) XVIII.*

‘For the Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander Pius Felix Augustus, Chief Priest, in the second year of his tribunician power, consul, proconsul, Father of his Country, the city of the Carvetii (*set this up*). From Carlisle, nineteen miles’ (223).

We can now see that the *civitas* was founded by 223 in the reign of the Emperor Severus Alexander. We can, I believe, offer some definition of its territory based on milestones. This is because milestones were, so far as we understand, normally erected by local authorities (Sauer 1998, 193). Some in Britain were measured from forts, Caerhun in north Wales, Lancaster, and Newstead in southern Scotland, but these do not, in themselves, disprove our assumption.

The milestones relevant to the study of the territory of the *civitas Carvetiorum* includes one found at Middleton in Lonsdale which bears the laconic inscription, *MP LIII*, 53 miles (*RIB* 2283). The most obvious place from which this milestone was measured is Carlisle (Birley, 1953). This is helpful in two ways. It ought to indicate a minimum southern boundary for the *civitas*; the fact that this is an unusually high distance for a British milestone may even, as B. J. N. Edwards has suggested to me (*pers. com.*), mark

the southern boundary of the city territory (Higham, 1986, 147). The relationship to Carlisle also strongly implies that this place was the *civitas*. If Kirkby Thore was the *civitas Carvetiorum*, as has been argued, we would expect the milestone to be measured from that place, not from Carlisle. The evidence, as it stands, in my view strongly supports the case for Carlisle being the city of the *Carvetii*. The fact that it had a second name, *Luguvalium*, should not concern us. Several other cities had two names (Mann, 1963 = Mann 1996a).

If weight is placed on the dedication to the goddess *Brigantia* found near Brampton as indicating that the territory of the *Brigantes* stretched into northern Cumbria, this would easily correlate to Ptolemy's statement of the extent of the tribe. But, by their nature, imperial officials travelled, and it is not impossible that the procurator had picked up an affinity to *Brigantia* while in York. It is possible, therefore that the territory of the *civitas Carvetiorum* was carved out of the land of the *Brigantes* or that it was a new fangled creation like the *Regnenses* in southern Britain. It is also possible that the *Carvetii* were simply omitted from his *Geographia* by Ptolemy, who was far from perfect in other aspects. A foundation date for the *civitas* in the late second or early third centuries might account for the absence of the tribe from Ptolemy (Shotter, *pers. com.*)

The territory of the city of the *Carvetii* included, we may presume, the Eden valley and all the land down to the Middleton in Lonsdale milestone. A city territory 50 miles or more across is not unusual. It has been argued that the territory of the *civitas* extended into Annandale (Higham, 1986, 147) and that this area was occupied by the *Anavionenses* (Birley, 2001). Otherwise, we cannot determine how far the territory extended to the north and west, though, as Hadrian's Wall was not necessarily the provincial boundary, the territory of the *civitas* may have extended further north. We can offer some evidence to help define the eastern boundary.

Milestones have been found on both the Stanegate and the Military Way. At Crindledykes on the Stanegate, to the east of *Vindolanda*, seven milestones ranging in date from Severus Alexander to Constantine I were found in 1882 (*RIB* 2299-2305). That erected in 223 states that it lay 14 miles (22 km) from an undefined point. Corbridge lies 14 miles (22 km) to the east of Crindledykes on Dere Street. Three milestones, one uninscribed, have been found on the Military Way near to MC 42 (Cawfields) (*RIB* 2306-7). One, also dating to 223, records a distance of 18 miles (29 km) from an unstated place. The commentary on *RIB* 2306 notes that 'the nearest junction to which the 18 Roman miles may be measured seems to be Portgate, 20^{1/5} Roman miles to the east, where the Military Way joins Dere Street'.

I draw two conclusions from this. Firstly, that Corbridge was indeed the measuring point for these milestones, and, secondly, that the town was almost certainly a *civitas* like Carlisle. The east boundary of the city of the *Carvetii* was therefore not more than 24 miles (38 km) to the east of Carlisle.

Corbridge

If we can define the eastern boundary of the city of the *Carvetii*, albeit only roughly,

we can also define the western boundary of the territory of the local authority based at Corbridge. This extended for up to 18 miles (29 km) west of the town. On the basis that milestones were normally erected by local authorities and were usually measured from each city, though, as we have noted, there are peculiarities, and bearing in mind the status of Carlisle, a place in general comparable, we would expect Corbridge also to be a *civitas*.

One immediate problem is that we do not know in which tribal territory Corbridge lay, not least because it is not listed by Ptolemy; or is it? The turning of north Britain has affected our understanding of the Tyne basin. Ptolemy placed the *Votadini* and the *Selgovae* to the north of the *Brigantes*. The *Selgovae* appear to have lived to the west side of the country and the *Votadini* to the east. The only certainly recognisable name within the territory of the *Votadini* which we can locate is *Bremenium*, High Rochester, whose name is attested on two inscriptions (*RIB* 1262 and 1270). The other two place-names given by Ptolemy for the tribe are *Alauna* and *Curia* or *Coria*. Rivet and Smith argue that the former, which Ptolemy appears to place on the southern coast of Fife, is either a confused repetition of *Alauna* = Ardoch in Perthshire, listed as the territory of the *Dumnonii* or, if correctly placed within the land of the *Votadini*, the fort at Low Learchild (Rivet and Smith 1980, 245). The crucial point is that uncertainty surrounds this name.

The third name is *Curia* or *Coria*. The former version of the name derives from the Latin meaning ‘in administrative language “court; ward; assembly”’ and in Britain and Gaul ‘is evidently “centre of a *pagus*”’ (Rivet and Smith, 1980, 317). *Coria* in British can mean ‘host or army’ or, more relevant here, ‘hosting-place’ in the sense of tribal centre (Rivet and Smith 1980, 317). There are several examples of the name in various forms in northern Britain. Rivet and Smith (1980, 320) suggest that the *Coria* of the *Votadini* was at Inveresk, a Roman fort and civil settlement on the south shore of the Firth of Forth. Dillemann (1978, 69) preferred to link the name with *Corie Lopocarium*, recorded in the Ravenna Cosmography (107¹⁸). Interestingly, Rivet and Smith (1980, 322-3) identify *Corie Lopocarium* as the *Corstopitum* of the *Antonine Itinerary* and place it at Corbridge, the real name of which, they suggest, may have been *Coriosopitum*. Combining the two arguments, or at least extracting those elements which support my proposal, it is possible to see Corbridge as the *Coria* of the *Votadini*. If this argument is correct, the territory of the *civitas* presumably included the Tyne Valley together with the valleys of the North Tyne and the Rede. An alternative would be to consider the *Lopocares* a people (Shotter, 2004, 5; Edwards and Shotter, 2005, 76, n. 6) with Corbridge being their city.

The name *Coria* appears in the *Vindolanda* writing tablets, the editors of which identify it as Corbridge; the tablet dates to about 98-104/5 (*Tab. Vindol.* III, 611). While not supporting the identification of Corbridge as the *Coria* of the *Votadini*, it does at least confirm that there was a *Coria* in the neighbourhood. *Coria* in itself must be an abbreviation for a longer name. The use of the word in this form in the *Vindolanda* writing tablets may indicate pre-Roman antecedents for the place and also strengthen the case for Corbridge later being a *civitas*.

A further complication is that within the area which I have tentatively allocated to the *civitas* at Corbridge an inscription recording another *Curia* has been found:

RIB 1695 (Beltingham): Deae Sattadae curia Textoverdorum . . .

‘To the goddess Sattada, the assembly of the Textoverdi . . .’

This is not dated but presumably is 2nd or 3rd century in date. It may give the correct name of the *civitas* based at Corbridge. On the other hand, it may point to the existence of a separate local authority, perhaps based at *Vindolanda*.

It should be noted that several other scholars have grappled with the problem of the Roman name of Corbridge. Hind (1980) argued that *Lopocarium* is an error for *Epiacum* and that the name of the site should be *Corioritum*, ‘the hosting-ford’. A. Breeze (2001) favoured emendation to *Corsobetum*, ‘the place of small birch trees’; this was rejected by Hodgson (2002). Breeze (2004) reiterated his argument and proposed that the *Coria* of the *Vindolanda* writing-tablets could be identified with the *curia Textoverorum*.

The extent of the territory of the *civitas* based at Corbridge was presumably defined to the north by the provincial boundary, which may have lain well to the north of Hadrian’s Wall (beyond it presumably lay the *Corionototae: RIB 1142*), to the west by that of the *civitas Carvetiorum* (if not that of the *curia Textoverdorum*), and to the east perhaps by the sea. To the south lay the *civitas Brigantum*, but we do not know its northern boundary and its territory may have been much smaller than the earlier pre-Roman tribe. Further, John Mann hinted that the Piercebridge ploughman, a man dressed as a priest guiding a bull and cow, may indicate the existence of a *civitas* based on Piercebridge in the Tees Valley (Mann, 1975, 8 = Mann, 1996, 157).

The relationship between civilian and military administration

A further area of consideration is the relationship between the military and civilian in the north. Again, it might be useful to start with evidence by analogy. In general, along the Rhine and Danube and the artificial frontier between, the army units were placed on the frontier line itself; rarely were forts placed behind, such as at Friedberg in the Taunus area of Upper Germany. The whole of the land right up to the frontier was given over to civilian administration, including, it would appear, the area around the fort at Friedberg. Cities sprang up along the frontiers each with their own territory. Each fort had its own territory allocated to it and each of them appears to have sat within land under civil administration, a true patchwork of authority.

I believe that we can transfer this pattern to the British frontier. We already have two *civitates*, of the *Brigantes* and of the *Carvetii*, with, I have argued, a third at Corbridge, perhaps occupying the Tyne Valley. Within the land of these *civitates* – and perhaps others whose existence is not yet attested – sat the forts with their own territory. One such territory is known, at Chester-le-Street, though the fragmentary inscription, dated to 216, only preserves part of the word, [. . . t]errito(rium), and does not place it in context (*RIB 1049*). The Romans were a disciplined people and we can be sure that boundary markers would have existed in North Britain defining the territory of city and fort as elsewhere in the empire (Mann, 1996b, 105).

How did the civilians who lived in the civil settlements outside forts relate to this administrative framework? We must first note that they will have lived on the territory of a particular fort, or rather of the regiment which was based in the fort and possibly had to pay rent to the unit. However, it is also clear that these people had their own organisation. This is amply demonstrated by the following inscriptions erected by groups of ‘villagers’.

RIB 899 add (Old Carlisle): . . . [Gordian] vik(ani) Mag(lonenses) aram a(ere) col(lato) a v(ikani)s d(edicaverunt).

‘ . . . the people of Maglona dedicated this altar from money contributed by the people’ (238-244).

RIB 1700 add (Chesterholm/Vindolanda): . . . vicani Vindolandesses curam agente [. . .] . . .

‘ . . . the people of Vindolanda under the charge of . . . ’.

RIB 1616 (Housesteads): . . .] Iul(ius) S[. . .] d(ecreto) vica(norum).

‘Julius . . . by decree of the villagers’.

JRS 47 (1957) 229-30, no 18 (Carriden): . . . vikani consi[s]tentis castel[lo] Veluniate cu[ram] agente Ael(io) Mansuetus . . .

‘ . . . the people living at Fort Veluniate under the charge of Aelius Mansuetus . . . ’.

It is remarkable that the civilians based in Fort Velunias at Carriden on the Antonine Wall, which was only occupied for a generation, were organised into a body. This may simply be because the people were already linked to the unit in the fort and brought their status with them, transferring it on to their new home when the Antonine Wall was abandoned. An inscription from Spain may offer a parallel. In 77, the Emperor Vespasian allowed the citizens of Sabora in Baetica in modern Spain to move from their hill-fort (*oppidum*) and build a new town on the plain, confirming their revenues awarded by Augustus (*ILS 6092* cited by Mann, 1961, 143). Salway (1965, 11-3) noted that the word *consistentes* on the Carriden inscription is likely to be used to mean ‘people who are living together’, though it could be used to denote people living away from their places of origin.

Officials

The formal title of only one official in a northern city is known, Flavius Martius, *senator* of the *civitas Carvetiorum*, who was serving as one of the two quaestors of the city. In addition, we may note Marcus Ulpius Januarius, an *aedile* recorded at Brough-on-Humber, in the territory of the *Parisii* who, early in the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-61), presented a stage at the theatre to his city (*RIB 707*).

Conclusions

Northern Britain has produced evidence for the existence of cities, self-governing towns and officials. Just because we do not have full evidence for the existence of a full pattern of *civitates* and other local government structures together with the full panoply of boundary markers and the like, we should not assume that these did not exist, but rather we should see north Britain as being part of the Roman empire and confidently look forward to the discovery of further evidence which will underline this.

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