

The Carvetii – a Pro-Roman Community?

CATHERINE ROSS

This paper considers the evidence for the nature of the native population in Carlisle and the Solway plain in the period immediately surrounding the Roman conquest. It focuses on those elements which indicate that the population, commonly referred to as the Carvetii, may have been pro- rather than anti-Roman and thus that Venutius, one of the British rebels made famous by the works of Tacitus, is unlikely to have originated in this area.

THIS paper investigates the evidence for the existence of a native group associated with the name ‘Carvetii’ and of the territory that they may have controlled in the late Iron Age and early Roman period. The area to be discussed extends from the Solway Firth in the north to the mountains of the Lake District in the south and from the Irish Sea coast on the west to the western scarp slope of the Pennines in the east. Previous theory, based mainly on the very limited surviving literature and one piece of epigraphic evidence, has labelled the area centred around Carlisle and the Solway Firth as the territory of the Carvetii. These have been portrayed as a native group, thought to be anti-Roman and a subsidiary part of the better-known Brigantes, a tribe who are generally thought to have controlled the entirety of northern England from the Tyne-Solway gap to the southern Pennines by a system of political and military alliances not dissimilar to the Roman system of client kingdoms.¹

In the paper I examine the extent to which *Luguvalium*, the Roman name for Carlisle, and other literary, epigraphic and archaeological evidence connected with the territory of the Carvetii may indicate the nature of the community living in the area, in the period before and after the Roman conquest of northern England. Primary sources in literature and extant archaeological information are used to determine whether there is any real evidence for the extent of the territory controlled by the Carvetii and the levels of interaction between the indigenous population of the north west and the incoming Roman population. The combined evidence is used to draw conclusions on the nature of the indigenous populations settled in north-west England during the first and early second centuries.

‘Tribe’ versus ‘Identity’

The longstanding assumption about the method of occupation of prehistoric Britain was that multiple large-scale invasions must have taken place. The invasionist theory remained popular until the 1960s, but from that time onwards there was a growing realisation that the mass migration theory did not fit with the available evidence.² Certainly there were flourishing trading routes between Britain and the continent,³ but its communities developed independently. Creighton has illustrated the wide variety of social structures in northern Europe, as described in the writings of Caesar:

In general the evidence paints a patchwork picture of the situation; no two neighbouring communities were necessarily organised in the same way. Kings (*regnes*) are mentioned in some communities but not others, and where they did exist they appear to have had varying levels of authority.⁴

At the time of the Roman conquest the indigenous population of Britain was certainly made up of a number of communities, but it does not follow that there was any similarity in their scale or in the social makeup of different areas. The term ‘tribe’ has, historically, been applied to the native communities, but it implies a strongly developed and recognised sense of identity among the members of these communities. Across much of Britain, there is currently insufficient evidence for this. A ‘tribe’ in the late Iron Age or Early Roman period may not always have been a group attached to a specific area, and the situation may have altered over time both geographically and structurally.

Mattingly suggests that, before the conquest, identities were fluid and that, ‘late Iron-Age identity may have been fashioned ... around the personality of individual rulers, with successive client kings controlling territories of varying size’.⁵ Cunliffe also describes a variety of social structures, suggesting that communities in the south may have been socially cohesive while those in the north depended on ‘powerful lineages to whom the widely-spread population owed some degree of allegiance’.⁶ He suggests that the degree of social cohesion within tribes may have depended on the size of their population. Thus, in central southern Britain dense populations formed into distinct tribes or confederations, but in the north and west (where settlement was more dispersed) social networks created more localised social identities:

These groupings, in say the south-west peninsula ... may have recognized their difference from communities further east and may have even considered themselves to be men of Dumnonia, but this does not necessarily mean that they recognized a unifying authority – the constraints of geography in these remote regions may have been sufficient to give the appearance of unity.⁷

Haselgrove highlights the specific development of communities in south-east England,⁸ arguing that ‘These transformations are associated with the development of ‘kingdoms’ – large scale polities with clear signs of social hierarchy and elites – and are essentially confined to south-east England’.⁹ Outside the south-east there is little evidence for similar processes or chronologies, even in major kingdoms around the Thames basin. While there are often indicators of the development of hierarchies, even this is not always the case.¹⁰ This very wide variation illustrates the difficulty in creating a single definition of what makes up a tribal entity, and thus the application of the term ‘tribe’ to any native community in Britain is particularly problematic.

Given the difficulty surrounding the term, and the lack of available evidence for the required levels of social cohesion in northern England, the notion of differences between communities in this area may be better expressed in terms of *identity*. The term ‘identity’ is sufficiently flexible to cover the range of possible communities in the area, and the different ways in which they may have interacted. Diaz-Andreu states that identity is understood as ‘an individual’s identifications with broader groups on the basis of differences socially sanctioned as significant’, and also that ‘through identity we perceive ourselves, and others see us, as belonging to certain groups and not others’.¹¹ According to this view, individuals could hold a number of identities at the same time and these might change according to personal choice. Communities could exist but there need be no similarity in their size, social organisation or the

extent to which they may have recognised a geographical identity (that is, some form of control or ownership over a specific area).

In this paper it is assumed that there is continued value in the concept of communities which recognised, among others, a form of geographic identity that meant (although not necessarily recognising an overarching authority or employing a ‘tribal’ name), that the communities living within these areas shared a range of other identities. This tied them into both smaller and larger units, but the identification of geographical units does not provide the full picture.¹² In particular the social relationships of individuals both within and between these regions can relate to an entirely different set of identities which did not necessarily recognise any form of hard geographical boundary.

The Carvetii in ‘modern’ literature

The Carvetii are rarely discussed as an entity in modern literature on the native late Iron Age communities of northern England and indeed there is only limited secondary literature on the area as a whole. Opinion has been revised over the last 60 years, but in reality there has been little proper consideration of the social organisation of northern England. In 1954 Wheeler published his findings from the excavation of the major *oppidum* site at Stanwick near Richmond in North Yorkshire.¹³ His opinions on the site itself have since been heavily revised by Haselgrove,¹⁴ but Wheeler firmly believed that the entirety of northern England was under the direct control of the Brigantes, who ruled it from Stanwick. By the 1980s Braund and Salway had revised the position slightly and felt that there was some debate as to whether the Brigantes could really have held direct control over such a large area.¹⁵ Braund favoured the idea of federation, whereby the different communities of northern England recognised the overlordship – although what they received in return or how this overlordship was recognised was far from clear. However, older ideas based on the work of Wheeler persisted and Hanson and Campbell continued to believe that the Brigantes maintained complete control over this area, where ‘disagreement is likely to have common and centralised control’.¹⁶ Further revisions in the late 1980s by Higham (1987) and Hartley and Fitts (1988) finally began to suggest that northern England may in reality have been made up of separate units and communities. However, both continued to assume that these must be bound to the Brigantes.¹⁷ Hartley and Fitts, in particular, developed the idea that northern England was made up of different communities, suggesting up to six ‘tribes’ and a potential multiplicity of others, all of which were within the aegis of a great confederacy under the overall control of the Brigantes. Finally, in 1989 Fairless concluded that there may have been a number of tribal septs in northern England, including the Carvetii. Although by this time most authors had begun to accept that the Brigantes could not have controlled all northern England in their own right, there was still a general view that they had some form of overarching power, even though there remains no evidence whatever to support this theory. Indeed, far from questioning quite how the Brigantes *could* have held such a large area, even though it was divided by the Pennines and the Lake District, Hartley and Fitts stated that ‘it is usual to assume that the Brigantes were a confederation of smaller tribes which had been welded into a larger unit during the later stages of the pre-Roman Iron Age’, and that ‘a remarkable and powerful figure must have been

responsible for the amalgamation of the diverse units'.¹⁸ Thus an assumption became a fact, on which other assumptions were constructed in turn.

The late 1980s saw the last detailed work on northern England, and although opinion had been much revised from since 1950s the basic premise – that the Brigantes held authority over northern England and thus the Carvetii were a tribal sept tied to the Brigantes through confederacy – was unchanged. Since then the communities of northern England have been considered only briefly in broader publications. Of these the work of Cunliffe (published in 1991) is perhaps the most important.¹⁹ He still considers that the Brigantes must have been the dominant force in northern England but no longer supports the concept of confederacy. Instead, he discusses the tribes of northern England as 'the Brigantes and their neighbours', arguing that 'the other tribal groups should not be overlooked nor should the whole north be written off as a Brigantian confederacy'.²⁰ This suggests a growing acceptance that the Brigantes may not have held the power attributed to them by earlier authors. The existence of other tribal groups, such as the Carvetii, was accepted, and there was increasing awareness that these may have existed in greater isolation (or independence) than previously thought. However, these ideas were voiced in very general histories, covering the whole of Britain, and there was still an assumption – apparently based more on respect for previous theory than on any firm evidence – that the Brigantes based east of the Pennines must have held some form of authority over all other communities of northern England including the Carvetii.

Surviving evidence for the Carvetii

There are few extant sources which can be used to interpret the nature of the Carvetii, or even define their existence. The name is not mentioned in ancient literature and the only surviving sources are three pieces of epigraphic evidence: a tombstone from Old Penrith and milestones from Frenchfield and Langwathby, both near Brougham in the Eden valley. Such sources are difficult to interpret, and since they are the only evidence for the Carvetii any assumptions about the nature and extent of this community must inevitably be speculative. In particular there was no use of writing in the region until after the Roman invasion, and the three inscriptions which refer to the Carvetii are likely to date from well after that period. It is also far from clear whether any of the few texts as yet found in northern England were produced by native hands. In addition, the prevalent use of abbreviations in epigraphy means that the three 'texts' which *do* survive can be interpreted in several ways. Without any corroborative references from ancient literature there can be no certain interpretation of the inscriptions. The result is that the only ancient evidence which survives for the Carvetii is late, ambiguous and very limited in extent.

It is therefore essential to consider other perspectives and circumstantial evidence. In particular, this paper draws upon a wider and deeper investigation of the nature and extent of social organisation in northern England as a whole during the late Iron Age and early Roman periods.²¹ This research considered the literary, epigraphic and archaeological evidence in the area stretching from the Tyne-Solway line in the north to the Humber-Ribble axis in the south with the exception of the territory commonly

attributed to the Parisi in the Yorkshire Wolds. It involved an assessment not only of written sources but also of surviving archaeological evidence, including both material cultural assemblages (such as ceramics, glass, lithics, bone and metalwork) and evidence for settlement patterning derived from both field and aerial archaeology across the area. This broad study indicated that not only is the area of north-west England considered in this paper of particular interest, but also that previous assumptions about the area and the name ‘Carvetii’ do not withstand this detailed investigation.

Epigraphic and dedicatory evidence

As with every other northern group apart from the Brigantes, evidence for the possible existence of the Carvetii is hard to find. Tacitus does not refer to them by name in the extant portions of either *Histories* or *Annals* and, as noted above, the existence of their name is attested only by three pieces of epigraphic evidence from the late Roman period. The first is a tombstone from Old Penrith, with the following inscription:

D M FL MARTIO SEN IN C CARVETIOR QUESTIORIO VIXIT AN XXXXV MARTIOLA
FILIA ET HERES PONEN ... CURAVIT.²²

*To the spirits of the departed (and) Flavius Martius, Senator in the civitas of the Carvetii, of Questorian rank, who lived for 45 years. Martiola, his daughter and heiress, had this set up.*²³

This tombstone commemorates one Flavius Martius but the abbreviations inscribed on it are open to debate.²⁴ ‘Sen’ has been interpreted as ‘Senator’, if his office was civilian, but in the fourth century the same word was often used to describe a non-commissioned officer in a military context. Yet again, it might simply stand for ‘Senior’ as a third element of the name. Similarly, Ireland has interpreted the ‘C’ to stand for *civitas* but Higham and Jones translate it as *cohort* or *canton*.²⁵ Unfortunately, there is no dating evidence for this inscription and therefore questions of whether its context is military or civilian, and which translation is most likely to be correct, remain open to debate. The fact that the monument was set up by the daughter and heiress of the deceased might indicate a civilian context, although this need not be the case if Flavius Martius was a senior military officer (in which case he could have had family present).

A milestone from Frenchfield, north of Brougham, is thought to settle the matter in favour of a civilian background. It appears to date from AD 260-269:

IMP CAES MA R CASIANIO LATINIANIO POSTIMO AVG PIO FELICI R(ES)P(VBLICA)
C(IVITATIS) CAR(VETIORVM)²⁶

*For the Emperor Caesar Marcus Casianius Latinianus Postumus Augustus Pius Felix [erected by] the public works of the Carvetian state.*²⁷

Higham and Jones argue that the abbreviation RPC Car at the end of this inscription must be translated as *respublica civitatis Car(vetiorum)*, confirming the existence of the Carvetii and their status as a *civitas* in the mid-third century.²⁸ A second milestone, discovered at Langwathby (also near Brougham) in 1993, can be dated to between 10 December 222 and 9 December 223. Its inscription reads:

IMP CAES M AVR SEV ALEXANDRO P F AVG PONT MAX TR P II COS PCOS P P C CAR
LVG M P XVIII.²⁹

For the Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander Pius Felix Augustus, pontifex maximus, in his second year of tribunician power, proconsul, father of his country, the Community of the Carvetii [set this up]. From Carlisle, 19 miles.

These inscriptions represent the only useable written evidence for the existence of the Carvetii, but it is clear that their abbreviated language is open to debate.³⁰ Nevertheless, while they only provide evidence for the Carvetii during the mid- to late-Roman period they are invaluable as the only ancient evidence for the existence of that name.

Ancient literature

Although in modern literature the Carvetii are normally assumed to have been in some way a sub-group of the Brigantes, there is no specific ancient evidence on which to make this connection. It is traditionally held that Venutius, sometime husband of Queen Cartimandua of the Brigantes (and the subject of passages in Tacitus's *Annals* and *Histories*) came from the Carvetii. There is, however, absolutely no reference to this in the works of Tacitus. Indeed, he does not mention the name of the Carvetii at all in his extant work. This means that the only hard evidence for the Carvetii is from third and fourth century inscriptions discussed above. Nothing ties these firmly to the text of Tacitus, the only extant evidence describing events surrounding the Roman occupation of northern England.

In *Annals* 12.40 Tacitus refers to Venutius as being under Roman protection 'all the while his marriage to queen Cartimandua held', and then with a change of subject goes on to describe 'young men' who 'invaded' her kingdom:

inde accensi hostes, stimulante ignominia, ne feminae imperio subderentur, valida et lecta armis iuventus regnum eius invadunt.

Inflamed by this, and goaded by the ignominious thought of submitting to her female command, the enemy – effective young men chosen for their armed fighting – invaded her kingdom.

Tacitus *Annals* 12.40

Venutius is not directly referred to as an enemy but the implication is certainly that he incited the actions of these 'young men' and was therefore directly involved in their invasion.³¹ The term *hostes* should be taken in relation to Rome and thus indicates that these young men and, by association, Venutius, were enemies not only of Cartimandua but also of Rome. Given the apparent good diplomatic relations between the Brigantes and Rome, this suggests that either the community was divided into two differing factions, with Venutius belonging to the anti-Roman side despite his close ties to Cartimandua, or that at least one other group or sub-group was present in northern England who were not on the same friendly terms with Rome.

On the basis that the Brigantes were thought to have ruled all of northern Britain, it has been assumed that Venutius was Brigantian, but in reality the information from Tacitus brings the matter into serious doubt. It is unfortunate that his earlier discussion of Venutius's background is no longer extant, because it might have helped to elucidate the precise sense in which Venutius was 'from the community of the Brigantes'.³² I suggest that his membership of that community might have come about through marriage (the existence of a marriage being confirmed by the reference to a divorce), rather than being membership by birth. It seems at least possible, on the basis of this passage, that Venutius could have been the leader of a different northern grouping, perhaps one which recognised some form of Brigantian overlordship,³³ and that he made a marriage alliance with Queen Cartimandua, perhaps as part of a Roman policy,³⁴ to gain the

benefits of Roman protection but over time became unhappy with the arrangement, possibly because he had expected but did not receive equal rule in order to have control over both peoples.³⁵ The events of AD 69 appear to have marked the final stage in the breakdown of relations between Venutius and Cartimandua. Tacitus states that Cartimandua ‘cut off Venutius’ brother and kinsmen’.³⁶ The meaning of *intercepit* here is unclear but whatever happened, such actions against Venutius’ family were a clear assertion by Cartimandua of her primacy and I believe that this, in addition to the statement that Venutius was not happy submitting to ‘her female command’ support the suggestion that Venutius had expected equal status in marriage but had not received it and this led to the breakdown of the arrangement.

Cartimandua was extricated from her predicament by the Roman authorities and there is nothing further in the literature to indicate her fate. Tacitus suggests that Venutius ‘got the kingdom’ and no moves were made against him until the arrival of Petilius Cerialis in AD 71.³⁷ He indicates that in the interim, during the governorship of Vettius Bolanus, no action was taken against Venutius because of the inability of the Roman governor to do so. Shotter questions the credibility of this scenario and points out that although Tacitus has little praise for Bolanus, his actions, including those against Venutius, must have been sufficient to please Rome since he remained in office until AD 71.³⁸

Assuming that the disagreement between Cartimandua and Venutius can be dated to AD 69, a relevant archaeological note can be made. Felling dates obtained from dendrochronology tests on samples taken from the earliest known Roman fort at Carlisle indicate that building was taking place there from about AD 72. There must therefore have been a Roman presence at Carlisle from at least that date and possibly even slightly earlier.³⁹ This is reasonably close to the time suggested for Venutius’s action against Cartimandua. The Roman movement into the north appears to have been concentrated on the western side of the Pennines in its earliest stages. It is possible that they may have chosen this route in order to take some sort of action against the tribe or tribal leader responsible for the removal of one of their client monarchs. The evidence for a Roman presence in Carlisle by AD 72, which perhaps indicates a deliberate choice to subdue the north west of the country before the east, can therefore potentially be related to Bolanus’s action against Venutius.⁴⁰ Although the earliest current evidence for actual building indicates that this took place shortly after Bolanus had departed, much of the preliminary action required to subdue this area is likely to have occurred during his period of office and would be represented by campaign camps rather than forts. If it was thought that the majority of the people on the eastern side of the country could be trusted, it would make sense for the Roman authorities to advance up the western side of the Pennines first. Whatever the reason, the now-confirmed Roman presence in Carlisle in the early 70s certainly supports the view that they initially moved in this direction. An intention to annex the homeland of the perpetrator of the AD 69 rebellion *could* have been a logical explanation for such action. However, the place-name evidence, discussed below, gives a strong indication that this scenario, while reasonable, may not in fact reflect the reality of social organisation in the north west. Indeed it seems possible that the Carvetii may have been a *pro*- rather than *anti*-Roman group.

Whatever assumptions are made about the Carvetii and their relationship to the Brigantes, it is important to reiterate the lack of any references to their name in any primary literature. Over the years much has been based on the works of Tacitus, but it must be emphasised that his story of Cartimandua gives no information at all about the Carvetii. The link between the Brigantes and the Carvetii was first made by historians writing 1,700 years after the events in question. All assumptions in modern historical literature about the Carvetii, the Brigantes and any links between them are therefore open to considerable doubt.

The lands of the Carvetii

The inscriptions quoted above give some evidence for the existence of the tribal name of the Carvetii. As noted though, they are from the third and fourth centuries AD and so in principle the name could be of purely Roman origin, or at least refer to an area ‘artificially’ created out of the newly reorganised northern territory. Historians have placed different interpretations on the position of the Carvetii after the conquest. Shotter suggests that ‘what the Romans developed as the *civitas Carvetiorum* may, in the pre-Roman period, have constituted a semi-independent “sub-group” of the Brigantes’.⁴¹ Rivet and Smith believe that the Carvetii were probably part of the Brigantian confederation and were later identified as a separate *civitas*. Under Roman rule, they suggest, ‘the Carvetii seem to have constituted a *civitas* in the third century, with its centre at Carlisle, and for some administrative purposes *Civitas Carvetiorum* may have been an alternative name to *Luguvalium*’.⁴² They also argue that the name itself may be derived from the British ‘carvos’ meaning ‘deer or stag’.⁴³ There is a possibility that this could have some relationship to the cult of the horned god Belatucadrus.

The territory that *could* have been held by the Carvetii is a topic of great debate and little proof. They are generally assumed to have been based in the Solway plain, the area immediately north of the Wall and in the Eden and possibly Lune valleys. This area also includes a presumed pre-Roman tribal centre at Clifton Dykes,⁴⁴ situated at the crossroads of four major natural routeways close to Penrith,⁴⁵ where there is also a concentration of dedications to Belatucadrus,⁴⁶ the horned god who is thought to have been associated specifically with north west Britain.⁴⁷

For many years a milestone from Kirkby Lonsdale, on the Westmorland-Lancashire border, has been interpreted as giving some possible evidence of a southern tribal boundary for the Carvetii.⁴⁸ It gives a distance of 53 miles from an unnamed location, which is usually thought to be Carlisle. This has been used as the basis for the suggestion that part of the Lune valley was within the tribal territory of the Carvetii, and it has been argued that the milestone marked the southern boundary of the community. However there is no reason at all why it should mark a boundary – this is unsupported hypothesis, and purely speculative. The same argument could equally, and perhaps more plausibly, be put forward for the Langwathby milestone. That is only 19 miles from Carlisle on the River Eden near Penrith. There may have been a fixed border between the inhabitants of the Eden valley and those of the Solway plain (in other words, approximately that between Cumberland and Westmorland until 1974). This suggestion is based on the wider social, economic and cultural analysis of northern

England noted earlier. The evidence includes a Roman containment fort at Eamont Bridge, Penrith, intended to control the southern part of the Eden valley; differences in settlement patterns between those of the Eden valley, which appears potentially hierarchical, and of the Solway plain which exhibits no such characteristics;⁴⁹ and the existence of a virtually uninhabited area between the two stretching roughly ten miles north west along the Eden valley from Penrith towards Carlisle.

Ultimately there is no evidence to prove that either milestone represents a border. Geographical and topographical considerations might in fact suggest that the major physical boundary created by the Howgill Fells, the Shap Fells, the Lune Gorge and the high land known as the Lune Forest would be a far more logical frontier. This is particularly apparent if it is seen in conjunction with the evidence from the Penrith area which indicates the presence of a second ‘community’ in the upper Eden valley area, separate and different from that of the Solway plain.

The research underpinning this paper revealed extensive evidence from the extant archaeological record of ceramics, metalwork, bone and glass to suggest that, wherever the mutual eastern boundary lay, there were clear differences between the communities to the west of the Pennines and those to the east.⁵⁰ These do not help in identifying the limits of the Carvetii and the differences between them and other groups in the north west, but they do make it clear that there were very limited links across the Pennines. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the evidence in detail but in brief it is clear that new styles of pottery entered the north east far earlier than the north west,⁵¹ and cattle bone reveals that the new types of Roman cattle were adopted in the north east but that the older Celtic shorthorn cattle were retained in the north west, possibly as a sign of status.⁵² The evidence of metalwork also suggests that hoards were deposited by the elite in the north east, but that there was a far more ‘egalitarian’ society in the north west.⁵³ Finally, dragonesque brooches, a form of decorative metalwork based on Iron Age La Tène culture, are found in the north west but not in the north east, again indicating a difference between the two areas, this time in terms of artistic preferences rather than social organisation.⁵⁴

The location of the northern boundary of the Carvetii is equally unclear. One piece of evidence, a statuette dedication to the goddess Brigantia, has been used to suggest the presence of the Brigantes at Birrens (near Lockerbie) but this is probably misleading, and the dedicator was actually an adherent of the Severan cult sent to the outpost from York.⁵⁵ Meanwhile Higham and Jones suggest that the good land at the southern end of Annandale, which comes close to fordable areas of the Solway as far west as Bowness, could also have been held by the Carvetii although there is no textual or epigraphic evidence to support this suggestion.⁵⁶ A northward focus for trade and communication from Carlisle, over the fairly easily forded water and flat, fertile lands of southern Dumfriesshire would certainly be logical and is indicated in the archaeological record by the presence of Type 3 bangles. These, which did not use cords or spirals in their decoration, were a form produced outside the Empire in southern Scotland and Northumberland. While none has been found in the north east, a few examples have been recovered from the north west suggesting contact and communication between communities in the Solway plain area and those to the north.

Certainly the use of Type 3 bangles in the north west but not in the north east is a further indication of the division between the two areas. The use of a form produced primarily outside the Empire may suggest that Carvetian territory extended beyond the Solway Firth but there is no further supporting evidence: it seems more likely that the northern boundary lay in the vicinity of the River Esk, but that the communities living to the north and south enjoyed good communications and trading links.⁵⁷

To draw more specific conclusions from the archaeology which might allow further differentiation between parts of the north west would be to assume too much from too little evidence. The archaeology clearly indicates that the populations living east and west of the Pennines were very different in their social characteristics and that there may well have been strong communication and trade links to the north beyond the limits of the Roman empire but the extant evidence cannot be used to suggest which part of the north west may have formed part of the territory of the Carvetii and which may have belonged to other communities for which no name evidence survives.

Place-name evidence

The Roman name for Carlisle, *Luguvalium*, may give some indication of the status of this site around the time of the conquest of northern England. The name is already unusual in that it is not found expressed in the usual manner for a *civitas* capital (ie. *Luguvalium Carvetiorum*). *Luguvalium* means ‘town of a man called Luguvalos’, the second element in the modern name (‘lisle’) being a corruption of this. The first element, *cair* meaning ‘fortified town’, also has a British base. Mills states this element was added after the Roman period,⁵⁸ demonstrating the continuity of both site and population from pre-Roman to post-Roman times. *Luguvalium* could have been a pre-existing name, dating back several generations before the conquest, but it could equally well have been the name of the chieftain at the time of the Roman annexation. If the Roman place-name for Carlisle does indeed preserve a contemporary Celtic personal name, it is of considerable interest. For the name of an individual to be included in that of any Iron Age place would indicate that he held high status, presumably that of a chieftain or tribal leader. A high-ranking leader of a group traditionally thought to be anti-Roman would not be left in control by the Roman authorities nor would his name be retained for it would serve as a reminder for the native population. Indeed, in such cases even if the name was of some antiquity it would be replaced by one based on a ‘tribal’ name. This process can be seen in southern England with communities such as the Atrebates. For his name to have been preserved in the place-name *Luguvalium* implies very strongly that the chieftain Luguvalos was acceptable to the Romans – perhaps a client ruler or at least sympathetic to Rome and cooperating with the occupation of the north. If this is the case, and if these were indeed the lands of the Carvetii, that group must have been pro-Roman. Even if they did not occupy land in the vicinity of the Solway Firth, the community focused on Carlisle must have been favourable to the Roman presence.

As already noted, it seems likely that the Roman conquest of the north moved up the west of the country and then headed into the north east. In the north west there was a smaller population to overcome, but if the people of the Solway plain were favourable

to the Romans it would be sensible to advance through their territory. Thus, it is unlikely that the Solway plain could have been the stronghold of Venutius, a famously anti-Roman British leader. Control of the north west would have given the Romans the opportunity to establish a base at Carlisle and ensure the containment of the Eden valley before moving eastwards into the territory of the Brigantes. A pro-Roman stance would have given Luguvalos a better chance of retaining some influence after the conquest, and the perpetuation of a Celtic personal name in the title of the Roman settlement at Carlisle (*Luguvalium*) might indicate the success of such an approach.

Conclusion

The Carvetii are the only group other than the Brigantes regularly cited by modern authors as holding power in northern England.⁵⁹ If this name has any link to a regional identity, it could in principle belong anywhere in northern England. However, research based not on the unreliable and indirect evidence of Tacitus but on the extant epigraphic and archaeological evidence from the north west, suggests that the most plausible options are the upper Eden valley and the Solway plain. If interpreted in a civilian context, the epigraphic evidence referring to a large civilian centre – probably Carlisle – suggests the Solway plain was the likely ‘homeland’ of the Carvetii. The early building works in the Solway area could indicate a pro-Roman stance in the population, with Carlisle acting as a base for the army before it tackled hostile forces in the southern Eden Valley. That area appears to have been separated from the Solway plain by an uninhabited zone in the northern part of the Eden Valley. While early military activity might alternatively suggest an anti-Roman population, the survival of the name ‘Lugovalos’ in the Roman name for Carlisle suggests that the area was favourable to the Roman presence with a ruler acceptable to the Roman authorities. The name of the Brigantes survived owing to their pro-Roman stance, and it is likely that the Carvetii, the other commonly mentioned group, were similarly placed.

If names can be associated with regional identities, and my proposition that the Carvetii were the *pro-Roman* inhabitants of the Solway plain is correct, the upper Eden valley is likely to have been inhabited by a different community for whom no associated name is yet known. If they were *anti-Roman*, the fort constructed at Eamont Bridge would have been at least in part an expression of Roman containment and control. There is no reason to associate Venutius with the name Carvetii, nor with the Solway plain. My research has identified several other distinct regions in northern England, almost any of which could potentially have been the origin for the anti-Roman leader.⁶⁰ The frequent assumption of a link between Venutius and the name Carvetii, which is based on no historical evidence, should be abandoned.⁶¹ He is more likely to have come from the Eden valley, where the presence of the containment fort indicates an anti-Roman population which took some time to crush. Such a population may well have had an actively Roman leader in the period shortly before the Roman invasion; that his name was Venutius is a plausible possibility. We can thus postulate the existence of two territorial groups, one in the upper Eden valley south of Penrith, the other focused on Carlisle and the Solway plain. The latter were probably the Carvetii, the name of the former is as yet unknown.

Historians have seen the Venutius story as the key feature of the history of the Carvetii, whereas both it and he may not even be related to this group. Instead of trying to write the history of the Carvetii from such unjustifiable assumptions based on literature, we should focus on the use of archaeology for the primary evidence which will eventually enable us to draw a far more reliable and detailed picture of the Carvetii themselves and of this key area of northern England in the late pre-Roman and early post conquest periods.

catherineross@yahoo.com

Notes and references

- ¹ See discussion below pp.57-58
- ² For further detail see B. Cunliffe, *English Heritage Book of Iron Age Britain* (London: Batsford, 1995) 20-22
- ³ See, for example evidence indicating trading contact from Stanwick in the Tees Valley. P. Turnbull, 'Stanwick in the Northern Iron Age', *Durham Archaeological Journal*, 1, (1984), 41-49
- ⁴ J. Creighton, *Coins and Power in Late Iron Age Britain* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 12-13
- ⁵ D. Mattingly, 'Being Roman: Expressing Identity in a Provincial Setting', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 17, (2004), 13
- ⁶ Cunliffe, *Iron Age Britain*, 57. See also S. James, "'Romanization" and the Peoples of Britain' in S. Keay, and N. Terrenato, (eds) *Italy and the West: Comparative Issues in Romanization*. (York: CBA, 2001a), 192 and 196
- ⁷ Cunliffe, *Iron Age Britain*, 58
- ⁸ Here torcs and coins developed as 'media used to articulate social relations' while in some areas horse-trappings appear to have formed a further part of this identity system. Haselgrove comments: 'there were notable changes in the forms, imagery and distribution of coinage, as well as significant alterations in the nature of domestic architecture'. C. Haselgrove, *et al.*, *Understanding the British Iron Age: An Agenda for Action* (Salisbury: Trust for Wessex Archaeology, 2001), 30
- ⁹ Haselgrove, *British Iron Age*, 30 Creighton also discusses the particular nature of community and individual development in the south-east, *Coins and Power*, 15-21
- ¹⁰ Haselgrove, *British Iron Age*, 30
- ¹¹ M. Diaz-Andreu, *et al.*, *The Archaeology of Identity: Approaches to Gender, Age, Status, Ethnicity and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1
- ¹² For discussions of different forms of collective identity see Diaz-Andreu, *et al.*, *Archaeology of Identity*
- ¹³ M. Wheeler, 'The Stanwick Fortifications: North Riding of Yorkshire' in *Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London* (Oxford, 1954), 17-22
- ¹⁴ C. Haselgrove, *et al.*, 'Stanwick Oppidum (Stanwick revealed as Cartimandua's Capital)', *Current Archaeology*, 119, (1990), 380-385
- ¹⁵ D. Braund, 'Observations on Cartimandua', *Britannia*, 15, (1984), 1; P. Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 108
- ¹⁶ W. S. Hanson and D. B. Campbell, 'The Brigantes: from Clientage to Conquest' in *Britannia*, 17, (1986), 73-89
- ¹⁷ N. Higham, 'Brigantia Revisited', *Northern History*, 23, (1987), 1-20; B. Hartley and L. Fitts, *The Brigantes* (Sutton: Gloucester, 1988); K. Fairless, *Aspects of Archaeology of the Brigantes* (Ph D thesis, University of Durham, 1989)
- ¹⁸ Hartley and Fitts, *Brigantes*, 1
- ¹⁹ B. Cunliffe, *Iron Age Communities in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1991), 189-193
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, 189
- ²¹ C. Ross, "Tribal Territories" from the Humber to the Tyne An Analysis of Artefactual and Settlement Patterning in the Late Iron Age and Early Roman Periods'. *BAR British Series*, 540, (2011)
- ²² RIB 933 in R. G. Collingwood and R. P. Wright, *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain: Volume 1 Inscriptions on Stone* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-83) 310
- ²³ S. Ireland, *Roman Britain: a Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1986), 217. Collingwood and Wright translate *SEN IN C* as 'senator in the cohort (or senator in the community)' Collingwood and Wright, *Roman Inscriptions*, 310
- ²⁴ Collingwood and Wright, *Roman Inscriptions*, 310-11
- ²⁵ N. Higham and B. Jones, *Peoples of Roman Britain: The Carvetii* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1985) 9
- ²⁶ The mason has misspelt Cassianio Latinio Postumo. Wilson and Wright argue that as the mason used the contraction CAR this means there were no other groups by a similar name in the area and that this can

- be expanded to Carvetiorum. D. R. Wilson and R. P. Wright, 'Roman Britain in 1964: I Sites Explored: II. Inscriptions', *JRS*, 55, (1965), 224 also RIB 2285a
27. <http://www.roman-britain.org/places/bravoniacum.htm>
28. Higham and Jones, *Peoples of Roman Britain*, 9 and D. Shotter, *Romans and Britons in North-West England* (University of Lancaster, Centre for North-West Regional Studies, 2004), 10 note 13
29. The milestone dates to AD 222-223 and is the earliest attested evidence for the existence of the name 'Carvetii'. C Barry, *et al.*, 'Roman Britain in 2004', *Britannia*, 36, (2005), 482
30. Dedications to the goddess Brigantia who, by virtue of her name, is assumed to be one of the prime deities of the tribe, are misleading. These are found in two areas; at Castlesteads, Crobbridge and South Shields and in a cluster around Leeds and the Upper Calder Valley (the only evidence for the Brigantes in this area). All of these dedications are from military contexts and must have been made after the Roman occupation of the north. Thus they present no evidence of any native activity nor of any form of tribal boundaries but are rather an indicator of the encouragement given by Rome to take up native deities in addition to their own pantheon. Dedications: RIB 2066 p.634, RIB 1131 p.373, RIB 1053 (Ireland, 1996 p.192), RIB 630 p.211, RIB 627 p.210, RIB 623 p.209 and RIB 628 p.211
31. Tacitus discusses the falling out between Cartimandua and Venutius in both *Annals* 12.40 and *Histories* 3.45 but the texts give different dates for what seems to be the same event. *Annals* 12.40 indicates a date around AD 51 but contains a serious dating discrepancy in suggesting that Aulus Didius was appointed governor before the events i.e. in AD 50 and after the death of Ostorius Scapula which means he cannot have been present until AD 52. *Histories* 3.45 has a far more definite dating indicating the period between the first Battle of Cremona on 14 April AD 69 and the capture of Valens in May of the same year. Therefore it seems likely that the events Tacitus describes occurred in AD 69 but the difficulties with the passages are an indication of the danger of taking anything Tacitus states at face value
32. Tacitus *Annals* 12.40
33. Many names may have been lost and it is far from clear whether any of those which do survive are of pre-Roman origin. Aside from the two most accepted and regularly cited groups, the Carvetii and Brigantes, the Gabrantovices (Ptolemy *Geography* 2.3.6), Tectoverdi (1695), Lopocares (Ravenna *Cosmography* 107), Corionototae (RIB 1142), Setantii (Ptolemy *Geography* 2.3.2), Anavionenses (ILS inscriptiones latinae selectae 1338) and Maetae (Dio Cassius 77.12) have all been put forward as possible northern 'tribal' groupings but of these only the Gabrantovices and Setantii are likely to represent pre-conquest names with Ptolemy placing the Gabrantovices somewhere on the Yorkshire coast and the Setantii somewhere in the region of Lancashire or southern Cumbria. For further discussion see A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London: Batsford, 1979) and Shotter, *Romans and Britons*
34. Tacitus notes that after Cartimandua handed over Caractacus, Venutius was the principal in knowledge of military affairs 'se post captum Caratacum praecipuus scientia rei militaris Venutius', Tacitus *Annals* 12.40. Given this, the Romans may have worked to secure a union between Venutius and Cartimandua, in order to keep such a potential military leader more firmly under the control of Rome.
35. Shotter believes that Venutius was the leader of the Carvetii, a tribe that appear to have been based in the North-west: Shotter, *Romans and Britons*, 16-17
36. *Cartimandua ... fratrem ac propinquos Venutii intercepit*, Tacitus *Annals* 12.40
37. A. R. Birley, 'Petilius Cerialis and the Conquest of Britannia', *Britannia*, 4, (1973), 179-90
38. Shotter, *Romans and Britons*, 22-24 and 28
39. *Ibid.* 35
40. Northern England was not brought wholly under Roman control until the campaigns of Agricola in AD 79 which finally suppressed the Brigantes. Tacitus *Life of Agricola* Chapter 20-21. Although the conquest was completed in 79 it is not clear exactly what action was taken in northern England and at what time and thus whether the north west was conquered before or after the north east
41. Shotter, *Romans and Britons*, 5
42. A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *Place-Names of Roman Britain*, 301-2
43. *Ibid.*, 301
44. Shotter, *Romans and Britons*, 5 and 16-17
45. Higham and Jones, *Peoples of Roman Britain*, 9
46. There may have been a Carvetian deity with a similar name to this but it is important to note that Belatucadrus is a Romanised form of the word and thus find-spots of dedications to a god of this name are only evidence of its existence after the Roman invasion. The significance of the dedications should not be dismissed but they are in themselves not evidence of a pre-Roman deity
47. Shotter describes Belatucadrus as Brigantian horned deity, which could suggest that the presence of such dedications is evidence of Brigantian power, but Higham and Jones state that the cult of Belatucadrus was limited to Cumbria and the western edge of Northumberland. (Shotter, *Romans and Britons*, 4-5 and Higham and Jones, *Peoples of Roman Britain*, 10-11). If Belatucadrus really was a Brigantian deity dedications

- could be expected east of the Pennines. The restriction of the cult to the north-west suggests that – if there were indeed such things as tribal deities, which is far from proven – it may have been associated with a tribe more closely identified with this area, such as the Carvetii. This is possible, but in fact there is no real proof that tribal deities did exist. Groups may certainly have identified with specific deities, but there is no reason to assume that such an association was further attached to a tribal identity. Indeed those individuals who worshipped Belatucadrus may have had differing regional identities, with some not considering themselves to have any identity beyond that of a family group or local area. For further discussion of religious identities see D. N. Edwards, 'The Archaeology of Religion' in Diaz-Andreu, *et al.*, *The Archaeology of Identity*, 110-128
48. RIB 2283: M P LIII (found beside a Roman road four miles north of Kirkby Lonsdale) Collingwood and Wright, *Roman Inscriptions*, 715
 49. The upper Eden valley, an area of relatively low land surrounded by hills on all sides but the north, is relatively densely populated. Here settlement runs in a roughly linear pattern north west from the upper end of the Eden valley to the confluence of the rivers Eden and Lowther to the east of what is now Penrith (NY 585,309). North of this area settlement falls from an average of five settlements per 10x10km square, to none. Settlements tend to cling to the edges of the valley, suggesting that the valley bottom may have been wet, with particular concentrations at the higher southern end. Although there are no larger settlements to indicate the presence of a hierarchy as seen in the Tees Valley the concentration of settlement at the southern end of the upper Eden valley, for which there is no obvious geographical reason, may indicate the presence of some form of hierarchy in the desire to cluster near to an individual. On the Solway plain settlement is also relatively dense but there are no clear concentrations and settlements appear to be distributed solely according to geographical characteristics, for example there is greater evidence for settlement on the lower and more productive land near the coast but very little on the lowest land which would have been prone to flooding. Ross, "Tribal with Territories", Chapter 4
 50. Ross, "Tribal with Territories", Chapter 3
 51. J. Evans, *Romanisation, Pottery and the Rural Economy in the North West* (unpublished); J. Evans, *This Small Harvest: Pottery from 'Highland zone' sites in north Wales and the North-West*. (2001, unpublished); J. Evans, 'Roman Finds Assemblages, towards an Integrated Approach' in P. Rush, (ed) *Theoretical Roman Archaeology: second conference proceedings* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995a), 33-58
 52. S. Stallibrass, 'Cattle, Culture, Status and Soldiers in northern England' in G. Fincham, G. Harrison, R. Holland and L. Revell, (eds) *TRAC 99*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2000), 64-73; S. Stallibrass, 'On the Outside Looking In: A View of Animal Bones in Roman Britain from the North West Frontier' in C. M. Mills, and G. Coles, (eds) *Life on the Edge: Human Settlement and Marginality* (Oxford: Oxbow Monograph 100, 1998), 53-60
 53. F. Hunter, 'Iron Age Hoarding in Scotland and northern England' in A. Gwilt and C. Haselgrove, (eds) *Reconstructing Iron Age Societies* (Oxford: Oxbow Monograph 71, 1997), 108-33
 54. S. Jundi and J. D. Hill, 'Brooches and Identities in First Century AD Britain: More than meets the Eye?', *TRAC 97* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1998) 125-137; C. Haselgrove, 'Iron Age Brooch Deposition and Chronology' in A. Gwilt and C. Haselgrove, (eds), *Reconstructing Iron Age Societies* (Oxford: Oxbow Monograph 71, 1997) 51-72; F. Hunter, 'Artefacts, Regions and Identities in the Northern British Iron Age' in C. Haselgrove and T. Moore, (eds), *The later Iron Age in Britain and beyond* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2007), 286-296
 55. From **Birrens** (RIB 2091): BRIGANTIAE SAMANDVS ARCITECTVS EX IMPERIO IMP. Collingwood and Wright, *Roman Inscriptions*, 640. The soldier was probably introduced to the cult of Brigantia at York, where it was set up by Severus after the division of Britain. It therefore cannot be used as evidence for the presence of the cult in South-West Scotland prior to this time
 56. Higham and Jones, *Peoples of Roman Britain*, 13
 57. R. B. K. Stevens, 'Romano British Glass Bangles', *Glasgow Archaeological Journal*, 3, (Glasgow Archaeological Society, 1974), 45 and J. Price, J. 'Romano-British Glass Bangles from East Yorkshire', J. Price, and P. R. Wilson, (eds), *Recent Research in Roman Yorkshire: Studies in Honour of Mary Kitson Clark* (BAR British Series 193, 1998), 349
 58. A. D. Mills, *Oxford Dictionary of British Place-names* (Oxford: OUP, 2003) 99
 59. See e.g. Shotter, *Romans and Britons*
 60. Other potential areas are the Lakeland Fells including the southern slopes and the area of Morecambe Bay, the County Durham area, and the Yorkshire Moors
 61. E.g. Shotter, *Romans and Britons*, 5