



The Status of Roman Chester.

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A recent paper by my friend Mr. C. E. Stevens, published in this Journal in 1942,¹ drew attention to some of the evidence for the early history and the final overthrow of the legionary fortress of Deva. The purpose of the present note is to consider a question which Mr. Stevens did not discuss; indeed, I cannot find that it has ever been considered seriously by students of Roman Britain. The legionary fortress itself is well known (for all that so much of it is irretrievably buried beneath the modern city) thanks to the devoted labours of successive generations of Chester antiquaries, and first and foremost of the late Robert Newstead, whose half century of watching and digging and recording has provided a firm basis for historical deductions such as those put forward by Mr. Stevens. But was Deva the site of a legionary fortress and nothing more?

It is a commonplace that such fortresses on the Rhine and Danube frontiers came, in the course of the first and second centuries of the present era, to be matched by flourishing towns. The process was a gradual one, and its incidence varied in different places; but broadly speaking it followed the same lines: at first, a haphazard collection of traders' booths and the like was pitched close outside the ramparts within which the legion hibernated between campaigns in the field; then, as the fortress came to acquire permanency and enduring structures, an increasing number of time-expired soldiers chose to settle in its *canabæ* rather than return to distant homes, more traders came, and the external settlement came to acquire the appearance at least of a town; finally, in many cases, that town was given

official recognition and the charter of a *colonia*, with its own magistrates and town-council and with fairly wide powers of self-administration. Such, for example, was the case at Vetera, in Lower Germany, the settlement at which in A.D. 69 is described by Tacitus, in a well-known passage,² as *in modum municipii exstructa*—"built like a town;" here, a generation later, Trajan founded a colony, *colonia Ulpia Traiana*, the remains of which lie below and around the little town of Xanten (itself largely ruined in the closing stages of the recent war). But not all such settlements received a charter; for example Mogontiacum,³ now Mainz, the capital of Upper Germany, though it possessed most of the external trappings and amenities of a town, remained until the time of Diocletian technically nothing more than a conglomeration of *vici* or villages; and yet it contained a quasi-municipal corporation, the *conventus civium Romanorum*, or association of Roman citizens who had made the place their home, and by the third century that body was governed by an *ordo* or town-council, the members of which were known as *decuriones*, and in that respect it was hardly to be distinguished from the normal self-governing urban community, whether *colonia*, *municipium* or the tribal *civitas* characteristic of Gaul and Britain. In the case of Trajan's colony at Xanten, its citizens could give *Ulpia Traiana* as their *origo*—*i.e.*, the self-governing community in whose record-office their birth had been registered; at Mainz, by contrast, inhabitants of the town could not give *Mogontiacum* as their *origo* for, lacking a charter, it had no record-office, and natives of the place would normally be listed in the records of the tribal *civitas Vangionum*, in the territory of which it was situated.

When we turn to Britain, York alone of the three legionary fortresses established in the Flavian period shows a comparable development to that at Xanten. At York a *colonia* is attested in the second quarter of the third century (R. G. Collingwood, indeed, made out an attractive case for assigning its establishment to Antoninus Pius, round

about the middle of the second century⁴); and by that time York was second only to London in importance. On the division of Britain into two provinces, it became the capital of Lower, as London was capital of Upper Britain; and in periods of active warfare, York was regularly the site of General Headquarters: Severus himself died there in 211, and it was there, almost a century later, that Constantius died and his son, Constantine the Great, was proclaimed emperor. Neither Caerleon nor Chester can claim any such development; and yet there is evidence, not recognised hitherto in this connection, which suggests that in the case of Chester at least there was something more elaborate than mere legionary *canabæ*, if not as highly organised as the colony at York.

We learn from the geographer Ptolemy⁵ that Deva was a town of the Cornovii (as inscriptions⁶ show that the tribal name is to be spelt); and we know too, as Haverfield first pointed out by analogy with conditions in Gaul,⁷ and Professor Atkinson's excavations at Wroxeter have finally proved,⁸ that the Cornovii were a self-governing *civitas*, with all the structure of a Roman provincial town, *ordo* and magistrates, but organised on a tribal and not an urban basis. In other words, inhabitants of Viroconium/Wroxeter were *cives Cornovii* and not *cives Viroconienses*; and that is what we should have expected to find in the case of inhabitants of whatever civil settlement was represented by Ptolemy's Cornovian "town" of Deva. To the Roman lawyer⁹ Viroconium was a village of the Cornovii, and the Cornovii themselves constituted a *civitas*; and as long as Deva was in the same political condition, the same rule would apply to it. But there are two inscriptions which seem to give Deva as an *origo*, and thus to indicate that at some time it had become independent of the Cornovii, and had acquired its own record-office and official status as a self-governing community.

The inscriptions in question come not from Britain but from Germany; that, no doubt, is why they have not hitherto attracted the attention of British scholars. The first is

from Worms, the Roman Borbetomagus, a town of the Vangiones (like Mainz) in Upper Germany¹⁰: [*in honorem*] *domus divinæ, Marti Loucetio sacrum, Amandus Velugni f(ilius) Devas v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*—"In honour of the imperial family, sacred to Mars Loucetius, Amandus son of Velugnus (citizen) of Deva, willingly and deservedly fulfils his vow." The second inscription was found at Trier, Augusta Treverorum in Gallia Belgica¹¹: *Leno Marti et Ancamnæ Optatius Verus Devas ex voto posuit*—"To Mars Lenus and Ancamna, Optatius Verus, (citizen) of Deva, has set up (this altar) in accordance with a vow." In the first case we have a man who is certainly not a Roman citizen, for he and his father each have the single name of *peregrini*; he cannot, therefore, have been a soldier of the twentieth legion (not that there is anything in the inscription to suggest that he was a soldier at all), for the citizenship of Rome was a pre-requisite for legionary service; and it is a justifiable argument from silence that both dedicators were in fact civilians. The immediate inference is plain: Deva was no longer a village of the Cornovii, but an independent town, by the time these inscriptions were set up. That time cannot be established directly, for neither inscription is dated; and yet it must be prior to A.D. 212, for by the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of that year Caracalla conferred Roman citizenship on all free inhabitants of the Empire,¹² and Amandus, as we have seen, was not a Roman citizen. The *terminus post quem* is less easy to fix: Ptolemy as we have seen, calls Deva a town of the Cornovii, and Ptolemy's active life was in the time of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius; but his information about Britain is derived from an earlier period—for example, he shows Lindum/Lincoln as a town of the Coritani, as it was until some time between 70 and 96, when it received the charter of a *colonia*.¹³ It will therefore be best if we content ourselves with noting that at some time between the Flavian period and the time of Caracalla's Edict, Deva had been given its independence.

What its precise status became, we cannot tell until further evidence comes to light; the choice lies between *colonia* (like York) and *municipium* (such as Mainz finally became under Diocletian). But at least the evidence of the two inscriptions which we have been considering may serve to direct the attention of Chester antiquaries to the area outside the legionary fortress, where the town thus established must have been situated; and it is to be hoped that one day Chester itself may produce the fresh inscriptions which alone can enable us to answer the question decisively.¹⁴

¹ Cf. *C.A.J.*, xxxv., 49—52.

² *Histories*, iv., 21.

³ Pauly-Wissowa's *Realencyclopädie*, xv., 2427 f.

⁴ *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Oxford History of England, i.), 171.

⁵ *II.*, iii., 11.

⁶ *Ephemeris Epigraphica*, vii., no. 922; *Journal of Roman Studies*, xiv., 244.

⁷ *V.C.H. Shropshire*, i., 215 f.

⁸ Cf. D. Atkinson, *Report on Excavations at Wroxeter*, 1942, 183.

⁹ Cf. *Digest L.*, i., 30 (Ulpian): *qui ex vico ortus est, eam patriam intellegitur habere, cui rei publicae vicus ille respondet; i.e.*, a man from a *vicus* or village gives as his *origo* the *civitas* to which that village is subordinate.

¹⁰ *C.I.L.*, xiii., 6221=Dessau, *I.L.S.*, 4573.

¹¹ *Année Epigraphique*, 1915 no. 70 = 1916 no. 28.

¹² Cf. *Cambridge Ancient History*, xii., 45.

¹³ The period when Lindum became a colony is established by an inscription from Mainz, *C.I.L.*, xiii., 6679, set up by a chief centurion of *legio XXII Primigenia*, native of Lindum, whose *tribus* is *Quirina*, the tribe in which all Flavian foundations were enrolled.

¹⁴ It may be noted that Holder, *Alt-celtischer Sprachschatz*, col. 1274, accepts *Devas* = *Deva(t)s* as a derivative from *Deva* = Chester without question, nor indeed does there seem to be any other place better qualified to claim the dedicators of the Worms and Trier altars as its citizens.