THE ROMAN ADVANCE INTO THE NORTH WESTERN MIDLANDS BEFORE A.D. 71

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Introduction

On the evidence of the earliest dated inscriptions, on water pipes and ingots of lead, from the city and surrounding area, the known legionary fortress at Chester is generally taken to have been built in the 70s of the first century A.D. (*See* the works cited in Carrington, 1977, 37 and 39, note 7; also Hartley, 1981, 245, which suggests a more complex picture). The precise implications of the water pipe inscriptions for the date of construction (generally taken to be coming to an end in 79) and indeed the very relevance of those on the lead ingots to the Chester fortress can be questioned (*see* Carrington in *Cheshire Archaeological Bulletin,* 10, forthcoming), but in general the deduction seems sound enough and is consistent with a strategy involving the final conquest of Wales and northern Britain, carried out in the governorships of Cerealis, Frontinus and Agricola (A.D. 71-83 or 84), as the historian Tacitus records for us in his biography of his father in law, the *Agricola.*

However, what these twelve years witnessed was, of course, the culmination, rather than the beginning, of Roman dealings with these troublesome highland zones. Given the crucial, Janus like, situation of the Cheshire Plain between the two zones, it is not surprising that it has often been pointed out that the Romans probably at least became familiar with this area rather earlier, the most frequently cited occasions being during the governorships of P. Ostorius Scapula and Suetonius Paullinus. It has also been argued that a fort may have been established on or near the site of the Flavian legionary fortress at either of these times. (*See* the works cited in Carrington, 1977, 39, note 11; also Dudley and Webster, 1962, 58-9 and Webster, 1981, especially 71). Archaeological discoveries in the city have been adduced to support the latter hypothesis. However, the implications of these discoveries are equivocal at best and it is therefore worth reconsidering in some detail the military situations that are thought to have given rise to this supposed earlier occupation. It has to be pointed out at the outset that these 'military situations', however they may be interpreted *vis à vis* Chester, are themselves of necessity merely historians' constructs based on uneven literary notices filled out by archaeological discoveries elsewhere which are, again, often equivocal. The following discussion contains no startling new facts or theories; rather, it puts forward an essentially conservative military scenario based

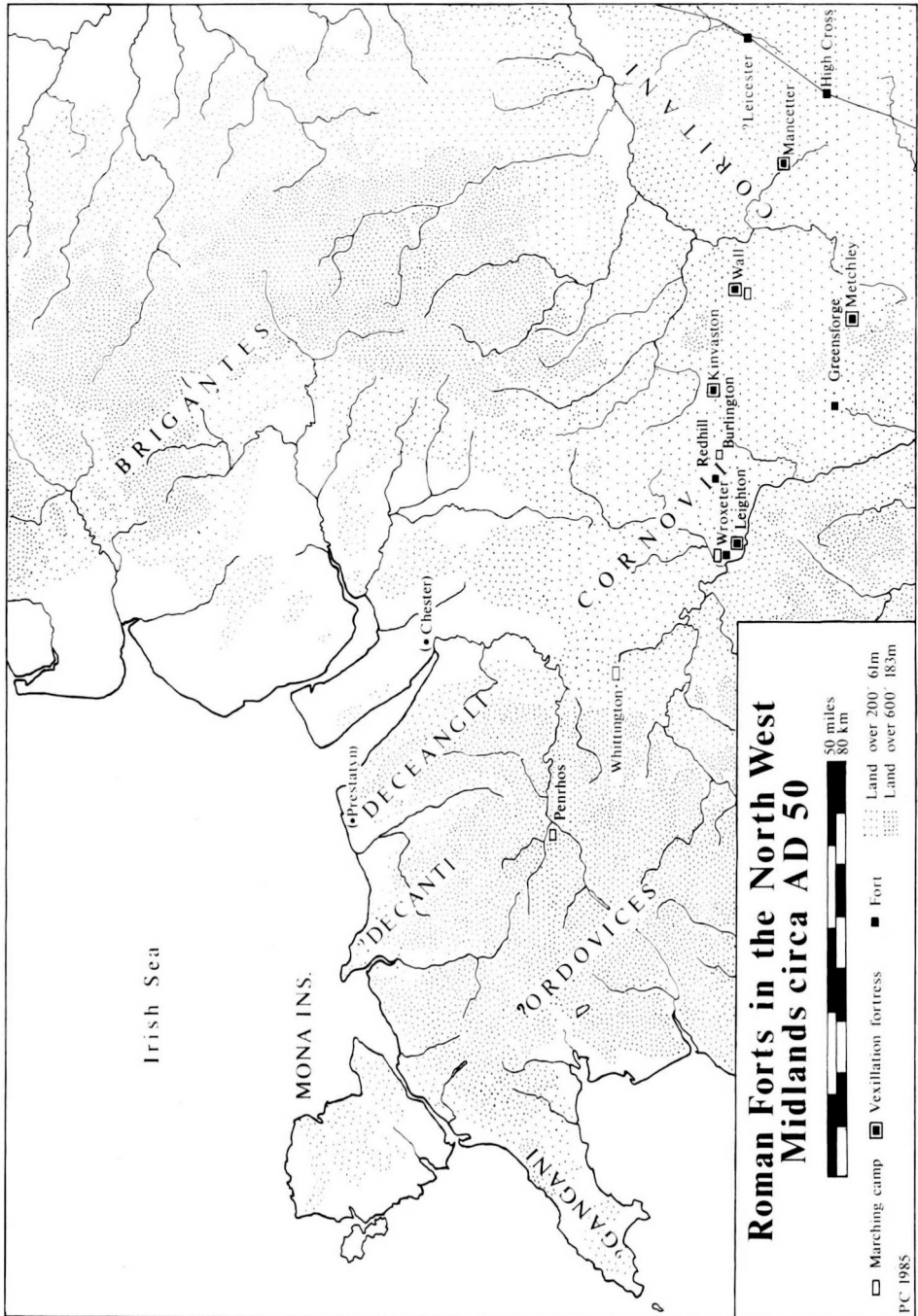**Roman Forts in the North West Midlands circa AD 50**

Fig. 1

on what is hopefully a sceptical re-appraisal of current interpretations of archaeological data. It cannot hope to be definitive, but it may serve to stimulate fresh thought on the subject.

Historical Summary

Tacitus (*Annals,* XII, 31-40) records that, on taking up his post, Ostorius Scapula (governor A.D. 47-52) was faced with an attack on allied tribes, presumably outside the province (possibly originally intended to be confined to the south east of the Fosse Way: Frere, 1978, 91-2; in detail, Webster, 1980, 123, 159-67; Manning, 1981, 27, footnote (a) is sceptical). Having overcome the immediate threat, his response was to disarm 'suspects' (presumably among the allies, but not necessarily the same ones) and set about 'securing with forts everything south east of the Severn and Trent'. This provoked a revolt, among the Iceni of East Anglia according to Tacitus, although this could be a mistake, which was suppressed. The governor then moved against the 'Decangi', ravaging their territory and collecting much booty and almost reaching the Irish Sea. This tribe is generally and probably correctly, identified with the Deceangli of north eastern Wales (Jarrett and Mann, 1968, 165-6; Rivet and Smith, 1979, 331; Webster, 1981, 19). In the following years of his governorship, military operations were concentrated against the stubborn Silures of South Wales and to a lesser extent the Ordovices of Mid and North Wales. (On the locations of these tribes *see* Jarrett and Mann, 1968, 167-71; Rivet and Smith, 1979, 434, 459-60; Manning, 1981, 15-23; Webster, 1981, 17-19). Under A. Didius Gallus (governor A.D. 52-57) and Q. Veranius (governor A.D. 57-58), fighting against the Silures continued, while under Gallus Roman arms also became involved in propping up the client queen, Cartimandua, in the increasingly unstable Pennine kingdom of the Brigantes. In A.D. 60, after two seasons campaigning against tribes not named by Tacitus but presumably the Silures and Ordovices or Deceangli (Dudley and Webster, 1962, 59; Jarrett, 1964b, 33-4; Frere, 1978, 103), Suetonius Paullinus mounted his celebrated invasion of Anglesey, from which he was recalled by news of Boudicca's rebellion (*Agricola,* 14; *Annals,* XIV, 29-30). (On the history of the whole of this period, in general *see* Frere, 1978, 92-103; Salway, 1981, 100-10; Webster, 1981, 19-39, 87-95, 104-7; on the 'Icenian' rebellion *see* Rivet, 1983; on Wales in particular, Jarrett, 1964b; Nash-Williams, 1969, 4-8; Davies, 1980, 255-61; Manning, 1981, 24-41; on the Brigantes, Hartley, 1980, 2-4; Braund, 1984; on their location, Rivet and Smith, 1979, 278-80).

P. Ostorius Scapula (Fig. 1)

The events of 47-48 were clearly of major importance in setting the course of British history for a generation. Unfortunately, Tacitus' account is short both on names and motives at crucial points. Modern scholars have spilled much ink trying to supply these, although only a few of them need to be reviewed here. In particular, the allies and their attackers are not named and although it would be natural to assume that it was the Deceangli who had been on the offensive and that Scapula's raid on them was basically punitive, it is usual to think of that tribe as rather small and remote

from vital Roman interests at that time. It has accordingly been inferred from slightly later events that the aggressors were the Silures and/or Ordovices and their victims the adjacent Dobunni and/or Cornovii respectively (Jarrett, 1964b, 25; Frere, 1978, 92; Rivet, 1983) and the raid on the Deceangli has consequently been seen as intended to deter them from taking up arms with the tribes to the south, against whom the governor may have intended to move next. Indeed, Manning (1981,28) has suggested that the conquest of the whole of Wales was now Roman policy. Moreover, the rebellion on the part of some of the Brigantes (presumably in the south western Pennines and perhaps in eastern Cheshire) which his raid provoked, has further suggested that there was a latent sympathy between the Pennine and Welsh tribes and that the Romans may have been trying to reduce the Deceangli to a neutral buffer zone between the two groups (Frere, 1978, 93-4; Webster 1981, 22-3). If so, the Romans almost created the active alliance they sought to prevent. This hypothesis may be supported by the fact that, a little later in Scapula's governorship, the British leader Caratacus, having led first the Silures and then the Ordovices to defeat against the Romans, chose the Brigantes among whom to seek refuge. However, fortunately for the Romans, Cartimandua was able to hold her tribe in check and honour her alliance: Caratacus was handed over as a prisoner.

Although their early appearance in Tacitus' account suggests that the Silures, at least, may indeed have been involved in the attacks of 47-48 and although the hypotheses concerning the wider strategic implications of the raid on the Deceangli may be valid, the possible importance of that tribe as a prime target in itself should not be ignored. As will be seen, it is possible that the tribe had a more extensive territory and population than is sometimes thought and would have been well able to mount an attack on , for example, the Cornovii, which would call for reprisals (*cf.* Manning, 1981, 28).

Tacitus' reference to Scapula almost reaching the Irish Sea has been taken to be an allusion to the Dee estuary (Jones, 1968, 1; Jones and Webster, 1969, 212; Jones in Grealey, ed., 1974, 1), which is reasonable, but not demanded. Also, as has been seen, it has been suggested that he established a fort at Chester. A site at Chester occupied during the campaign is certainly plausible, but again not demanded. The fortress at Rhyn Park has generally been interpreted as a base for this campaign. (On Rhyn Park in general *see* St. Joseph, 1977a; 1977b, 145-8; Jones, 1977; Goodburn, ed., 1978, 436; Goodburn, ed., 1979, 296-7; Salway, 1981, 103; Webster, 1981, 83-4; Jones, 1982; Frere and St. Joseph, 1983, 51-3. Full publication of Professor Jones' excavations is urgently needed). However, as demonstrated below, the little pottery that the site has produced may indicate a rather later date, from the late fifties onwards. By contrast, a series of sites which should receive more detailed consideration in connection with this attack than it has done so far, is that of approximately forty acre marching camps at Wall, Burlington, Wroxeter, Whittington, near Oswestry and Penrhos, near Corwen (St. Joseph, 1973, 236-7, 242-4). The fact that the series starts so far back in the Midlands strongly suggests that it belongs to this period, while its general direction clearly shows that the northern Ordovices or the Deceangli were the target.

The one battle fought by Scapula against the Ordovices which Tacitus records (*Annals,* XII, 35) is generally located in the upper Severn valley (e.g. Frere, 1978, 97; Salway, 1981, 105-6; Webster, 1981, 29). If, therefore, excluding the possibility of campaigns not recorded in the literary sources, the Wall-Penrhos series of marching camps are associated with the attack on the Deceangli, then this tribe may well have had a more extensive territory than is sometimes thought. The most precise evidence for their location is the survival of the tribal name in that of the medieval *cantref* of Tegeingl, which lay between the rivers Dee and Clwyd. This is supported by the existence of lead ingots stamped DECEANGL (*Deceanglicum metallum*?) assumed to come from mines on Halkyn Mountain. However, it is hard to imagine that a tribe whose territory was virtually restricted to the Clwydian range would have been attacked *via* Corwen. It may well, therefore, have extended further south, around the head of the Vale of Clwyd and further west as well. Jarrett and Mann (1968, 165-6) allowed them to extend as far as the Conwy, on the grounds that the absence of marching camps and forts from the intervening area was consistent with the fact that only one episode of fighting against the tribe is recorded (*cf.* Jarrett, 1964a, 207, 209; 1964b, 25-6; Webster, 1981, 34, 82). Their topographical conclusion may be correct and certainly the tribe is not known to have offered any further resistance to the invaders: Deceanglian lead may have been exploited by Roman entrepreneurs by the sixties, before the final subjugation and occupation of Wales as a whole (*see* Carrington in *Cheshire Archaeological Bulletin,* 10, forthcoming). However, there is now possibly evidence for a fort at Prestatyn (Wilson, ed., 1974, 398; Frere, ed., 1977, 358; Davies, 1980, 261 and note 19; Jones, 1980, 97-102; Grew, ed., 1981, 314-15; Frere, ed., 1985, 252-3), while E. Waddelove has argued (1979) that there was a Roman road from Corwen down the Vale of Clwyd, with conceivably a fort at Ruthin. Clearly, therefore, the Roman military occupation of this area is still far from being understood.

Later in Scapula's governorship, as has already been observed, Tacitus is explicit that it was the Silures and Ordovices who provided the threat and it would appear from his accounts that the Romans' main difficulties were with the former tribe: although it is possible that Paullinus spent much of his governorship campaigning against the Ordovices, they are not actually mentioned by name between their defeat under the leadership of Caratacus and their final crushing by Agricola. The archaeological evidence is usually taken to indicate that it was to meet this slightly later threat that, in the course of Scapula's governorship, Watling Street was extended westward to Wroxeter, where an auxiliary fort was established; and that a military base was founded at Gloucester (Kingsholm). However, it is also possible that the extension of Watling Street corresponds to Tacitus' expression about Scapula 'preparing to secure with forts everything south east of the Severn and Trent' (which alternatively could be taken to refer to the existing province south east of the Fosse Way) before attacking the Deceangli. If this is correct and if this land was the same as some of the territory of the allies attacked in A.D. 47-48, then one allied tribe was certainly the Cornovii (Manning, 1981, 27). Unfortunately, archaeological evidence cannot be dated so closely. It is known from Tacitus that a legion (by inference from inscriptions, Legion XX) was moved from Colchester against the Silures (*Annals,* XII,

32), most probably to Kingsholm but possibly to other sites as well and it is safe to assume that Legion XIV was also moved forward in the Midlands.

Frequently in the mid first century, unless the strength of the enemy demanded it, legions are now believed not to have had a single base, but to have been divided among several so called 'vexillation fortresses', where they were brigaded together with auxiliaries. Thus, detachments of Legion XX may contemporaneously or successively have been based at Clifford and possibly Clyro and Weston-under-Penyard as well as at Kingsholm, before they were probably reunited at Usk sometime in the 50s. In the Midlands, although the general picture of advance is clear enough, the details are even more complicated. Detachments of Legion XIV may have occupied fortresses at Mancetter (near Nuneaton), possibly Wall, Kinvaston and Metchley (west of Birmingham) before the legion reached its celebrated base at Wroxeter. (On vexillation fortresses in general, see Frere, 1978, 94-100; Frere and St. Joseph, 1974, 6-7; 1983, 38. On individual sites see Webster, 1981, 42-4, 49-54, 65-71, 85, 116; Nash-Williams, 1969, 7-8, 77-80; Davies, 1980, 258-60; Manning, 1981; Frere, ed., 1984, 295-7; Hurst, 1985, especially 119-23). It has also been suggested that the fortresses at Leighton, south east of Wroxeter, (St. Joseph, 1973, 234; 1977, 145) and Rhyn Park were held contemporaneously during this period by vexillations of Legion XIV (Frere and St. Joseph, 1983, 53). If this suggestion were correct, a fort at Chester, only one day's march to the north, would be perfectly possible. However, as already observed, the Rhyn Park fortress is possibly to be dated later still; the mere fact of a military presence in north eastern Wales had just been shown to destabilise the Brigantian front and there were serious threats to the south, while the apparent lack of further opposition from the Deceangli could as well be the result of their defeat at the hands of Scapula as of surveillance from a fort at or near Chester.

A. Didius Gallus

When Cartimandua's position among the Brigantes was seriously threatened, it is generally assumed that it was in the north eastern sector that troops were advanced. It may have been at this time that a vexillation fortress was established at Rossington Bridge, near Doncaster, linked to other forts along the eastern flank of the Pennines at Templeborough, possibly at Chesterfield and at Littlechester, near Derby, as well as to rearward bases at Newton on Trent and Lincoln (Simpson, 1964, 11; Jones, 1968, 2; Jones in Grealey, ed., 1974, 1-2; Webster, 1970, 191; Todd, 1973, 30-1; Hartley, 1980, 2; Webster, 1981, 87-95, 98-102; on Chesterfield, see the cautionary comments in Frere, ed., 1985, 282). Legionaries at Rossington Bridge would have been within two days' march of the hillfort at Barwick in Elmet, near Leeds, which is now canvassed as the site of Cartimandua's capital (Ramm, 1978, 26-9; 1980, 28-31; Webster, 1981, 90-3). However, Professor G.D.B. Jones (1968, 2-4; in Grealey, ed., 1974, 1) has also pointed to the possibility of early advances along the western flank of the Pennines, citing the inferred Neronian fort at Trent Vale (on which see also Webster, 1981, 101-2 with further references and Wilson ed., 1971, 259-60) and the still enigmatic site at Astbury, near Congleton (on which see also Watkin, 1886, 298-9).

There may now also be evidence for pre Agricolan Roman activity even further north, at Walton-le-Dale and Ribchester, both on the Ribble (A. Olivier: lecture to 11th One Day Archaeological Conference at the University of Lancaster, 18 February 1984 and personal communication; *see also* Frere, ed., 1984, 284-6 on Walton-le-Dale). The precise date, extent and duration of any such advances remain unknown, but, in the case of Trent Vale, it is probably long term defensive measures against possible Brigantian dissidents in the south western Pennines which are being dealt with and possibly, in that of the other sites, if indeed they are military, with the western arm of an offensive pincer movement on the kingdom as a whole. The latter could belong to the governorship of Petillius Cerealis and represent the advance of Legion XX under Agricola, presumably from Wroxeter (Tacitus, *Agricola,* 8, 17). It has also recently been suggested that the fortress at Rossington Bridge, known only by aerial photography, was Cerealian (Frere and St. Joseph, 1983, 50-1).

It may have been during the governorship of Gallus that most of Legion XX was reunited at Usk and Legion XIV at Wroxeter, with the frontier in the Welsh Marches advancing west of the Severn (Frere, 1978, 100; Davies, 1980, 258-60), although some of the preceding vexillation fortresses may also have been his work. According to a conventional understanding of Roman military thinking, one would not expect a legionary fortress such as Wroxeter to remain for long in the front line and it would therefore be logical if the decade A.D. 55-65 saw the establishment of a screen of auxiliary forts approximately one day's march to the north, at Rhyn Park, in succession to the larger fortress, Whitchurch (Jones and Webster, 1969, 198) and Trent Vale, forming a frontier line that could have extended east to Littlechester. (For part of the route *see* Webster, 1981, 101-2, Route 50; also 62, fig. 32 and 92, fig. 36). Whether the larger fortress at Rhyn Park was constructed under Scapula, or as will be argued below, by Paullinus *c.* A.D. 59, does not affect this hypothesis.

Suetonius Paullinus (Fig. 2)

The brief records that exist of Paullinus' Welsh campaigns make their implications for military dispositions difficult to assess. Tacitus states (*Agricola,* 14) that the attack on Anglesey came in the third year of Paullinus' governorship and as it is the only incident which he describes in detail (*Annals,* XIV, 29-30) — indeed, as he makes clear, he saw it as the culmination of the fighting — it is inevitable that it should influence any interpretation of the objectives of his previous campaigns. However, although Paullinus' second year of campaigning, at least, must to some extent have made the attack on Anglesey militarily possible, it should not be assumed that it was undertaken solely, if at all, with that end in mind; the capture of Anglesey was not his primary objective (that was presumably the conquest of Wales as a whole), but merely a secondary one, the need for which possibly only became clear in the course of his governorship.

As already noted, Jarrett (1964b, 33-6) suggested that the first season would have been spent consolidating the Roman position against the Silures. Self evidently, at least one season would have been spent somewhere in North Wales. Tacitus' state-
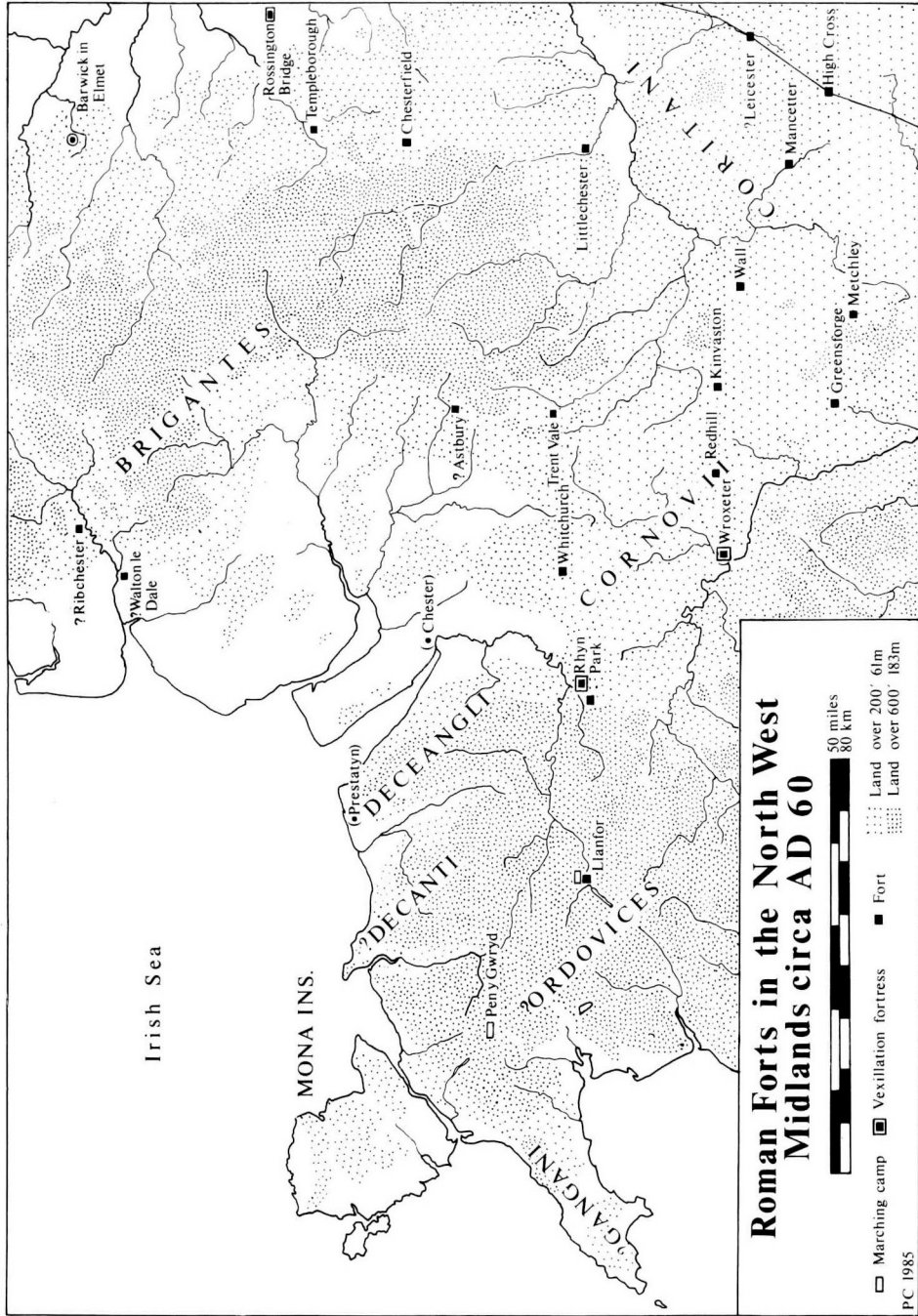
Roman Forts in the North West Midlands circa AD 60

Fig. 2

ment (*Annals,* XIV, 29) that flat bottomed boats were built to ferry the infantry across the Menai Straits has led Dudley and Webster (1962, 58-9), followed by other scholars, to argue that Chester would have had to be secured for use as a naval base, possibly involving fighting against the Deceangli. Dudley and Webster further envisaged, despite the lack of supporting archaeological evidence, that the main advance on land would then have been along the North Wales coast from Chester. Such a route admittedly has the attraction that the first part of the march could have been made in relative safety, since the Deceangli would already have been pacified, by Ostorius Scapula, if not by Paullinus as well; and the troops could have been reinforced and supplied by ship, as was done later by Agricola in his advance up the eastern coast of Scotland (*Agricola,* 25; *cf.* Frere, 1978, 129-31). Agricola's strategy seems to have been to force the Highland tribes out of their fastness to a pitched battle, where their defeat was inevitable, perhaps by seizing the coastal corn lands and by using the mobility conferred by his fleet into terrifying the Caledonians into believing that 'their last refuge in defeat was cut off'. It is noteworthy that Tacitus (*Annals,* XIV, 29; *Agricola,* 14) likewise describes Anglesey as populous, a source of manpower and a haven for fugitives. Agricola served as a military tribune in Britain under Paullinus (*Agricola,* 5) and it would be natural if his own campaigns to some extent reflected lessons learned earlier. However, the topographical situations in North Wales and Scotland north of the Clyde-Forth line are different and after a year's fighting in North Wales an inland route to Anglesey may well have been as feasible as a coastal one. The possible archaeological evidence for an inland route will be discussed later.

First, however, regarding the crossing of the Straits, the possibility ought to be considered that the boats were constructed on the spot, when required; the construction of pontoons for a bridge in a fortified dockyard at the 'front line' during the Second Dacian War is depicted on Trajan's Column (Cichorius, 1886-1900, vol. 3, 306-8 and Taf. xcviii; Rossi, 1971, 201-2; Richmond, 1972, 30-1 and vol. 10). If the barges had been built at Chester, they would have had to be more substantial to withstand a possible rough sea while being towed to the Straits and there would still have remained a risk of loss during the passage; whereas if they were built on the Straits themselves it becomes possible to think in terms of little more than rafts (although Tacitus does use the word *navis,* 'ship', rather than *ratis,* 'raft' or 'pontoon'). It has to be admitted that Tacitus (*Agricola,* 18), in describing Agricola's own lightning attack on Anglesey soon after his arrival in Britain, says that the enemy were taken by surprise when the Roman cavalrymen swam across the Straits, as they did not believe an invasion was possible without a fleet. An obvious conclusion would be that this belief was based on Paullinus' tactics seventeen years earlier. However, on that occasion also, the cavalrymen swam across. It may be wise, therefore, not to give too much weight to this passage as an historical source; it may reflect more about Tacitus' desire to magnify his father in law's prowess and imagination as a general.

Returning now to possible inland routes between Wroxeter (which would presumably have been Paullinus' starting point) and Anglesey, Dudley and Webster (1962, 59) suggested, in considering the governor's hasty return to face Boudicca, a route up the Conwy valley or even the Nant Ffrancon and along what is now the

A5. Sir Ian Richmond (1963, 40) also suggested that the latter route, in the reverse direction, may have been followed by Agricola for his attack on Anglesey. The use of parts of this route by the Roman army at an early date is now attested archaeologically by the fortress at Rhyn Park, the marching camp at Pen y Gwryd (Nash-Williams, 1969, 126, no. 13) and perhaps indirectly, by the marching camp, fort and stores depot at Llanfor, near Bala (St. Joseph, 1977b, 149-50; Goodburn, ed., 1978, 406; Davies, 1980, 261; Frere and St. Joseph, 1983, 105-6), in addition, of course, to the camp at Penrhos, tentatively assigned to Scapula. Of these sites, the only one to have produced any dating evidence is Rhyn Park. Although this fortress has usually been assigned, without any obviously strong reasons, to Ostorius Scapula, Professor Jones has referred (in Goodburn, ed., 1979, 296-7; 1982, 20) to the discovery there of pottery similar to military wares from Wroxeter. The pottery in question has not yet been published, but if his observation is correct, it is most easily understood if Rhyn Park post dated the foundation of the Wroxeter fortress, although far more would need to be known about the pottery from the fortresses which preceded Wroxeter in the West Midlands, to be able to argue this case strongly. However, even if Rhyn Park does post date the foundation of Wroxeter, it could still be assigned to Frontinus, or, less likely, Agricola, as well as to Paullinus. Strategic and historical arguments allow the other sites to be dated with some degree of probability to the same three governors, but no more precisely.

However, there is a little information to indicate roughly what size of marching camp should be assigned to the Anglesey campaign. It is known from Tacitus (*Annals*, XIV, 34) that the governor had about ten thousand men for his decisive encounter with Boudicca, comprising Legion XIV, vexillations of Legion XX and auxiliaries. These auxiliaries were summoned from the nearest forts, but it is certain that there would have been some on the Anglesey expedition. Legion XIV, being then based at Wroxeter, would certainly have accompanied Paullinus into Wales and it is probable that the vexillations of Legion XX did also. (The whole legion would not have gone as the Silures could not have been left unwatched). The Welsh campaign force would therefore have consisted of at least ten thousand men, probably rather more. Richmond calculated, on the basis of the marching camp at Rey Cross, in Cumbria, that a single legion (*c.* 5-6,000 men) required a camp of 18-20 acres (7-8 ha.) (*see* Frere and St. Joseph, 1983, 24-5). Paullinus' force would therefore have occupied camps of at least forty acres. Although Rhyn Park is classed as a fortress rather than a marching camp, it nevertheless appears to have been occupied by tents and Richmond's calculations could therefore still be relevant. If so, with an area of 42.5 acres (17.2 ha.), it may have been able to accommodate Paullinus' forces, while it is worth noting that Llanfor (*c.* 30 acres) and Pen y Gwryd (9.5 acres) add up to roughly the same figure. The conclusion of such a line of argument would be that Paullinus divided his army near Corwen, that three quarters headed south westwards towards Bala and only one quarter, *c.* 2,500 men, continued *via* Pen y Gwryd and the Llanberis Pass to attack Anglesey. However, it has to be admitted that this is a surprisingly small force for so celebrated an attack; the marching camp at Llanfor need not belong to the same season of campaigning as the attack on Anglesey, if, indeed, it is Paullinan

at all and finally, Pen y Gwryd need not have anything to do with Anglesey, as it may have been considered preferable to reach the coast *via* the Conwy valley rather than further west.

Thus, the archaeological evidence for Paullinus' operations in North Wales in general and Anglesey in particular is, at best, tenuous and at worst, non existent. Nevertheless, in more general terms, there is now good evidence for the use by the Roman army of what may be called the 'Dee Valley route' in the conquest of the area, probably on more than one occasion (since Rhyn Park and Whittington and Penrhos and Llanfor are too close to be contemporary). This stands in marked contrast to the present total lack of evidence to substantiate the more popular idea of an advance along the coast from Chester and must increase the likelihood that Paullinus took an inland route to Anglesey.

Quintus Veranius' sole campaign as governor had been against the Silures (Tacitus, *Annals,* XIV, 29) and as previously discussed, it has been suggested that Paullinus spent a further year dealing with them. Logically, he might then have tackled the next tribe to the north, the Ordovices, basing himself on the new fortress at Wroxeter. Athough most of north western Wales is generally assigned to this tribe, its precise extent is uncertain: in particular it is not clear whether the Clwyd-Conwy area, the Snowdon *massif,* (which in any event is likely to have been sparsely populated) and Anglesey fell within its territory (contrast Rivet and Smith, 1979, 434 with Jarrett and Mann, 1968, 167-70). The route to Anglesey suggested here could therefore conceivably have followed the northern frontier of Ordovician territory, rather than have lain within it. However, in either event, Paullinus would presumably have had to spend his second year fighting that tribe before the use of such a route became possible. Dudley and Webster (1962, 59) suggested that in that year, as well as supposedly securing Chester, Paullinus might have isolated Snowdonia by a thrust from Wroxeter up the Tanat Valley and over to Bala and thence to Tomen y Mur. As observed above, the complex at Llanfor, if it is Paullinan, could be evidence for some such movement.

Despite their disruption by Boudicca's rebellion, it would be wrong to assume that Paullinus' Welsh campaigns had no lasting effect. In *Agricola,* 14, Tacitus states that he spent the first two years of his governorship 'conquering tribes and establishing forts' and in the *Annals,* XIV, 30, that he garrisoned Anglesey, of which the supposed fort at Aberffraw could be the tangible remains (Goodburn, ed., 1979, 268; White, 1979). Had not the rebellion intervened, the conquest and garrisoning of Wales would probably have been completed, in all likelihood involving some sort of fort at Chester. In the event, it is probable that newly established garrisons in advanced positions would have been withdrawn to help re-establish order. Nevertheless, Tacitus (*Agricola,* 17-18) makes no mention of campaigns against the Ordovices by Frontinus, but merely mentions the final destruction of their military strength by Agricola. It is clear that, by the end of his governorship, Frontinus was establishing forts in, or on the borders, of Ordovician territory (*cf.* Frere, 1978, 121-2), but, unless he did far more actual hard fighting against the tribe than Tacitus gives him credit for (which is quite possible), Paullinus' campaigns must have had some lasting effect, if only in seriously reducing for at least half a generation their manpower of military age.

The Sixties

Tacitus (*Histories,* III, 45; *Agricola,* 16) records little military activity in Britain beteween Paullinus' departure and Vettius Bolanus' rescue of Cartimandua from hostile elements within her own kingdom (A.D. 69-70). Even though it would have suited his purpose of eulogising his father in law to present this picture in the *Agricola,* it does make independent sense. After the destruction and impoverishment caused in the Boudiccan uprising, both by the rebels themselves and by the governor in subduing them, the need would have been, not for further territorial expansion, but for the encouragement of Roman ways, to reduce the danger of future rebellion and the restoration of prosperity, to make Britain a province worth holding (Frere, 1978, 108-17; Salway, 1981, 122-33). It therefore seems *a priori* unlikely that the limit of occupation in the northern Midlands would have been deliberately pushed forward significantly during the sixties, especially later in the decade, when Legion XIV was withdrawn from Britain for a projected eastern campaign. It was replaced at Wroxeter by Legion XX and Usk was abandoned. From then until the seventies both South Wales and south west England had to be controlled by Legion II Augusta (hitherto at Exeter), from its new base at Gloucester. The effects of this reduction in forces and, furthermore, of the loss of any auxiliary units which may have gone with the legion, would doubtless have been felt throughout the military zones of the province (Davies, 1980, 260-1).

Even if the Romans' military objective in the area in the sixties was therefore to contain the defeated but not crushed Ordovices and the Brigantes, who from the early fifties onwards had become increasingly unreliable and to isolate them from one another, rather than to set about actually acquiring control of their territories, it could still be argued that a failure to hold the supposed focal point at Chester, between the two groups, is surprising. Certainly, it does not lie far in advance of the other forts that can be taken to have been founded by this time (Rhyn Park, Whitchurch and Trent Vale). However, in terms of overland communications in the Cheshire Plain, Chester is not an inevitable choice for a central site, being located to the north west of many through routes. This can be seen in the development of the Roman road system between the Marches and the North about the end of the first century, in which Whitchurch emerges as a nodal point and Chester is to some extent bypassed (Jones in Grealey, ed., 1974, 4-7) and in modern times by the growth of the major railway junction at Crewe. It is only in road systems linking northern England with Wales north of the Dee that Chester becomes an obvious candidate. Moreover, the military role for a central site (the strategic one of a legionary fortress), continued throughout the sixties to be fulfilled by Wroxeter. In siting any forts in the Cheshire Plain the Romans would therefore have taken a tactical view of the precise location of potentially hostile population groups and the routes they used. These are both factors of which much more needs to be known; but if the Deceangli really were quiescent, as is generally assumed and southern Lancashire was sparsely populated (Jones, 1968, 17; Jones in Grealey, ed., 1974, 6), there may simply not have been a tactical role for Chester or any other sites in north western Cheshire, as the Romans may well have been able to continue to achieve their military objectives with the forts that may

already have been established in the late fifties along what is roughly the southern edge of the present day county. Such a front line would have followed the high ground forming the watershed between the tributaries of the Dee-Mersey and Severn-Trent river systems, a line which, nowadays at least, affords extensive views across the Cheshire Plain to the Welsh mountains and the Pennines.

Given the constraints on Roman policy imposed by the need to make the province viable again and later by a shortage of troops, there may also have been good diplomatic reasons for adopting the 'low profile' approach just described. The ultimate strategic importance of the Cheshire Plain in general as a nodal area must have been apparent both to the Romans and the natives; consequently, any attempt by the Romans to occupy it may well have been the sort of provocation which would have strengthened the hand of anti Roman elements among the Brigantes and finally toppled Cartimandua and the fragile peace she represented. Tacitus' sneering verdict (*Annals,* XIV, 39) on Paullinus' successor as governor, Petronius Turpilianus, that 'neither provoking the enemy nor provoked, he called this ignoble inactivity peace with honour', although presumably intended to refer to his relations with the recently rebellious provincials, might have been equally appropriate to his policy towards tribes beyond the frontier. Indeed, although the suggested Rhyn Park-Whitchurch-Trent Vale line may have satisfied the prime criterion of being tenable militarily, it is conceivable that it also had the advantage of coinciding, at least approximately, with the northern boundary of the already subjugated Cornovii. (Ptolemy, in his *Geography,* II, 3, 11, admittedly assigns Chester to the Cornovii. Strictly this cannot have been correct after the foundation of the legionary fortress, as the latter and the land assigned to support it, would not have formed part of a tribal territory, although it remains geographically plausible that the Dee Valley-Weaver Valley area in general, which was probably the most densely populated part of Cheshire, was originally Cornovian. However, it may also have been a 'no man's land' before the Roman conquest (Strickland, 1980, 7) and may have been assigned to the Cornovii later out of administrative convenience).

The strategic importance of the Cheshire Plain eventually became real rather than potential when the Romans were virtually compelled, at the beginning of the seventies, after the fall of Cartimandua, to occupy northern England and chose to complete the conquest of Wales, with the ensuing need for a legionary base further to the north west than Wroxeter. Probably the crucial factor then tipping the balance in favour of Chester as the new central site was the possibility offered by the Dee and the numerous deeply penetrating estuaries of Wales and Lancashire, of establishing supply links between the legionary base and other garrisons by ship: far more economical than land transport (Manning, 1975, 114; Thompson, 1965, 6, 10, 47-8). Indeed, it is conceivable that the stationing at Chester of Legion II Adiutrix, raised during the Civil War of A.D. 69 from men of the Adriatic fleet based at Ravenna, indicates that a more than usually important naval role was foreseen for the fortress. Thus, the geographical key to Chester's importance lay not only in the fact that it was sited at the lowest crossing of the river (its mediocre position as regards overland transport has already been noted), but in the combination of this fact with

the other side of the coin, namely, that it lay at the highest point that could be reached by sea going ships.

Archaeological Evidence from Chester

The military arguments that have been advanced for pre Flavian occupation at Chester have found local archaeological support in the form of cremation burials in the *retentura* of the legionary fortress. The one surviving cremation vessel, the so called 'Steven's Urn', has been said to be Neronian in style. As Roman law forbade burials within settlements, these cremations have been taken to imply the existence of an earlier military establishment, possibly further to the south, near the Castle (Stevens, 1942; Jones, 1968, 4; Nash-Williams, 1969, 7; Jones in Grealey, ed., 1974, 1; Hartley, 1981, 245; Webster, 1981, 71). This suggestion cannot yet be rejected conclusively, because relatively little excavation has been done in this part of the city. However, although the style of the vessel is undoubtedly mid to late first century in general terms, it is impossible to date it precisely; similar vessels have been found in early layers in the legionary fortress. It is therefore possible, for example, for the cremation to have been deposited at an early stage in the Flavian occupation of the site, before the limits of the legionary fortress had been defined. On the other hand, there may be a simpler explanation. Two groups of comminuted fragments of burnt bone, which resemble, but cannot be proved to be, human cremations, were deposited in pits on the Abbey Green site in the period *c.* 120-160, when that part of the fortress, like some others, may have been temporarily unoccupied. (The writer is grateful to Mr. T.J. Strickland and Mrs. M.G. Morris of the Grosvenor Museum Excavations Section for making this information available to him in advance of their own publication). Thus, it is not possible to rely on the law concerning burials always having been strictly obeyed. This comes as less of a surprise in the second century, when the fortress seems to have become somewhat dilapidated, but perhaps it ought to be accepted as a possibility in the first century as well.

The published coin histogram from Chester does not suggest pre Flavian occupation (Shotter, 1979, 4, 8-9) and in the writer's view, there is no more pre Flavian pottery than could reasonably be expected to have continued in use into the Flavian period, although more comparative figures from sites thought to have been founded roughly at the same time would be useful. Mr. B.R. Hartley has admittedly drawn attention to a number of Neronian/Flavian samian stamps from the city which, he argues, demand occupation earlier than the presumed foundation date of the legionary fortress in the late seventies, but believes that their presence could be explained, for example, by the presence of a vexillation of Legion II Adiutrix in the early seventies, possibly in connexion with the exploitation of Deceanglian lead (Hartley, 1981, 245). Even so, a lack of unequivocally pre Flavian finds cannot eliminate the possibility of a briefly held position; there could still be acceptable structural and stratigraphic evidence for occupation at Chester pre dating the legionary fortress, but so far no convincing evidence of this sort has been recognised from the site of the fortress or the surrounding area. A number of ditches have been found in an area of extra mural settlement, 200-400 m. outside the eastern wall of the legionary fortress (Newstead,

1902, 93-4; 1928, 94-102 and pl. xxvi; 1939, 83-95, 106-7, 113 and pls. xv, xxii-xxviii, xxx), apparently filled with late first to early second century pottery. These could be interpreted as part of the defences belonging to an earlier fort (either pre or early Flavian), to a construction camp for the Flavian legionary fortress, such as was found at Inchtuthil, or to the extra mural settlement (Newstead, 1939, 8; Thompson, 1965, 45; Ward and Strickland, 1978, 5; Mason, 1978, 31-2). The ditches were excavated many years ago under very unfavourable conditions. It would be most interesting to conduct further excavations. The Boughton area, *c.* 1.5 km. east of the legionary fortress, on the road to Manchester and York, has produced a number of urned cremations (last assembled in Mason, 1978, 38-40; more have been found since then and have been published in the *Cheshire Archaeological Bulletin*). These are situated further than one might expect from the fortress and its extra mural settlement and may indicate earlier occupation in that area. However, none of the pottery so far examined by the writer looks obviously earlier than that from the fortress and there is no reliable structural evidence (but *see* Watkin, 1886, 300). The buildings supposedly associated with the 'box' rampart at Abbey Green (McPeake, 1978, 13-16; McPeake *et al.*, 1980, 15-17) have not survived re-examination of the excavation records, while the 'box' rampart itself, if it existed, is no longer thought to be pre Flavian. (The writer is grateful to Mr. T.J. Strickland for this information; Mr. Strickland will publish his conclusions in detail).

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