

II.—JULIUS VERUS AND HADRIAN'S WALL.

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All students of Roman Britain must be grateful to Mr. E. B. Birley for the excellent example he has shown in publishing so speedily his most interesting account of the excavations carried out on Hadrian's Wall, to the west of Newcastle, in 1929. I trust I shall not be thought lacking in appreciation of his promptitude or of the sterling quality of his report, if I say that his treatment of the Julius Verus episode does not seem to me entirely satisfactory from the point of view either of ancient or of modern history. It will be best to take the modern aspect of the matter first, and accordingly I shall begin by quoting his summary of Haverfield's hypothesis regarding the well-known passage in Pausanias, viii, 43, italicizing the words about which I have a difficulty :

“First, there is the literary evidence for disturbances in Britain shortly before and after A.D. 160. This is supported by a number of inscriptions, recording extensive repair work, at Birrens and Netherby to the north of the Wall, at Brough in Derbyshire, and *on the Wall itself*; and by the slab found in the Tyne, recording the arrival of a draft from the Rhine armies, transferred to the three British legions. From this evidence, professor Haverfield deduced that *the Wall* and Birrens were involved in the rising of the Brigantes that Pausanias records, and were restored by Julius Verus in A.D. 158.”¹

A footnote indicates that the article summarized is the one contributed by Haverfield to *Archæologia Aeliana* in

¹ *Arch. Ael.*, 4th ser., VII, 171.

1903,² "On a Roman Inscribed Slab from the Tyne." Reference to this article, however, will show that no inscription from the Wall—not even *C.I.L.* vii, no. 563—was included in the evidence on which the deduction was based, and further that there is nowhere any suggestion that the Wall was "involved in the rising of the Brigantes," still less that it was "restored by Julius Verus in A.D. 158."

Had the article in *Archæologia Aeliana* stood alone, it would no doubt have been possible to argue that, though he did not actually say so, Haverfield must have regarded it as self-evident that the destruction and rebuilding of forts both to the north and to the south of the Wall could not but have entailed the destruction and rebuilding of the Wall itself. It so happens, however, that early in 1904 he communicated to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland a paper on "Julius Verus, a Roman Governor of Britain," which will be found in vol. XXXVIII of the society's *Proceedings*.³ In the interval Ritterling had been prompted by Haverfield's original article to put forward certain alternative suggestions. One of these was that Julius Verus had been engaged on "some more or less elaborate work connected with Hadrian's Wall," and here is Haverfield's answer :

"I regret that I cannot agree with most of this. . . . Further, it is to be observed that Julius Verus, in all his four appearances, occurs off the line of Hadrian's Wall. If he carried out a systematic reconstruction of the frontier defences of the Wall, we should expect to meet him oftenest on that Wall. As it is, we meet him once many miles away from the Wall, and three times in its neighbourhood, but never actually on it. Nor does evidence exist for any systematic reconstruction of the Wall in 158. The one inscription cited by Dr. Ritterling [*C.I.L.* vii, no. 563] stands alone. That incidental repairs were executed under Pius, as under other emperors, is likely enough. That the Brigantian fighting involved the Wall is also likely. More than this seems neither provable nor probable."⁴

² 2nd ser., XXV, 142 ff.

³ Page 454 ff.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 458 f.

It will not escape notice that the word "involved" does find a place here. At the same time the context shows plainly that it is used in a strictly limited sense, meaning no more than that the garrisons of the forts had a part to play in the war; that Julius Verus "carried out a systematic reconstruction" is explicitly said to be "neither provable nor probable." The article I have quoted was, of course, written some years before the mile-castles and turrets had begun to yield up their evidence of successive occupations. When that evidence actually emerged, Haverfield might very naturally have been disposed—many of us were—to interpret Level I B as representing the handiwork of Julius Verus. But neither in the cordial tributes which he paid to the results achieved by Messrs. Gibson and Simpson⁵ nor elsewhere can I recollect anything which suggests that he did so. In fact, the only amplification of his original statement which he seems to have made is in his account of Corstopitum in the *Northumberland County History*. There he says that "about A.D. 158-164 nearly all northern Britain was in uproar." Then, after pointing out how difficult it is to date the overthrow of particular structures, when disorders came so thick, he proceeds :

"That, however, the revolt of A.D. 158-164 meant special peril to Corbridge is revealed by a special find; by far the largest hoard of Roman gold yet discovered in north Britain was then lost or buried in a crisis. The great 'store-house' now fell. Whether the 'pottery-store' suffered in the same trouble or later, is not so clear."⁶

Here, if anywhere, one would have thought, there was an opportunity for mentioning the Wall. But the Wall is again passed over in silence, perhaps because it seemed hard to understand why Newcastle should have been chosen as a landing-place for reinforcements, unless the line leading thence through the disaffected area had still

⁵ *Year's Work in Classical Studies*, 1911, p. 163 f., and 1912, p. 179 f.; *Arch. Anz.*, 1912, p. 291 ff.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, X, p. 480.

been held in strength. In any event, however, it is immaterial whether Haverfield did or did not change his mind. It is sufficient to have shown, as I hope I have done, that there is no inconsistency between the Julius Verus hypothesis, as originally propounded, on the one hand, and the explanation of Level I B, which is now advanced, on the other. It follows that it is not necessary to demolish the hypothesis in order to support the explanation, and equally that it is not permissible to employ the explanation as a weapon in attacking the hypothesis.

The explanation being eliminated as a factor in the discussion, we now are free to consider the hypothesis on its own merits, and are thus brought back to ancient history. Haverfield believed that Julius Verus had to deal with a great rising of the Brigantes, whose territory is generally supposed to have extended from Dumfriesshire in the north to the Derbyshire hills in the south. Mr. Birley⁷ would divide the Julius Verus episode into two parts: "a frontier war, like that of A.D. 180, fought to the north of Hadrian's Wall," and a 'sort of a war' which was "localized in the Pennines." He declines to accept the current view as to the extent of country inhabited by the Brigantes. "*A priori*," he argues, "it is unlikely that a section of the Brigantes would have been left outside the new limes by Hadrian, when the bulk of the confederacy was to the south of it." Surely, however, what Hadrian aimed at was a frontier which should be 'scientific' in the geographical rather than in the ethnographical sense. If he had gone beyond the Tyne and Solway, he could not have stopped until he reached the Forth and Clyde—an alternative which he obviously must have quite deliberately set aside. Nor do I feel happy about the grounds on which Mr. Birley rejects the dedication to Brigantia from Birrens as relevant testimony. His contention is that it "need prove that Birrens was in Brigantian territory no more than the Carvoran inscriptions to the Syrian goddess,

⁷ *Arch. Ael.*, 4th ser., VII, p. 172.

that the Wall was in Syria." But is there not a fundamental difference between a world-religion like that of the Dea Suria and a mere local cult such as that of Brigantia? Dedications to the one are found in various parts of the Roman empire, dedications to the other within the limits of a restricted and well-defined area only.

The appeal to the text of Pausanias is hardly more convincing. "The passage in Pausanias," it is urged, "certainly does not demand the assumption of a war so serious and widespread as to involve the whole of the north, including both the Walls, but rather suggests a local raid, followed by swift retribution and the confiscation of much of the raiders' territory." Does this not come perilously near to special pleading? Pausanias is concerned to emphasize the peaceful policy of the Emperor Pius, and to that end he sets out to prove that all the wars which he waged were defensive in character. This he does by enumerating what were presumably the most important and adding in each case a statement of the occasion that provoked it. How could he in these circumstances have hoped to escape criticism if he had singled out for particular mention a "local raid," which he might safely have ignored, and had said nothing at all about what Mr. Birley himself describes as "a frontier war," accompanied by "destruction on the Scottish Wall, and at Newstead and Birrens"? To the further point that Brough is "the only clear case of restoration at this time in the Brigantian area," it is hardly necessary to refer. Besides involving a *petitio principii* as regards the extent of the Brigantian territory, it savours of the *argumentum ex silentio*, an instrument whose untrustworthiness was demonstrated in the most striking fashion by the Birdoswald discoveries of 1829, of which Mr. Birley himself *pars magna fuit*.

In conclusion I should like to come back to the point from which I started. Such criticism as this note contains is in no way directed against Mr. Birley's main thesis, but only against a line of argument from which I think

that he himself will probably be quite ready to depart, all the more so that such a course will enable him to enrol Haverfield among his supporters, so far at least as Julius Verus is concerned. His conclusion that "there is no evidence that Hadrian's Wall was involved in disaster before the time of Clodius Albinus"⁸ will be important, if it can be finally established. As he indicates,⁹ it may or may not involve a readjustment of current views as to the Scottish Wall. In that connection a word of warning may be timely. There must be no confusion between the literary and the archæological evidence. Mr. Birley writes :

"The passage in the epitome of Cassius Dio records that the barbarians broke through the Wall that separated them from the Roman stations, slew a general and his men, and were then defeated by Ulpus Marcellus, who restored the Wall that had been broken."

This goes too far. Dio tells us that the invaders overran a Wall, but he does not tell us that Ulpus Marcellus rebuilt it. He merely says that he "gave the barbarians a terrible thrashing."¹⁰

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 167.

¹⁰ *Hist. Rom.* lxxii, 8.