

## VIII.—A NOTE ON THE DATE OF THE VALLUM.

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The appearance, a dozen years ago, of Mr. F. G. Simpson's paper (written in conjunction with Dr. R. C. Shaw) on *The Purpose and Date of the Vallum and its Crossings*,<sup>1</sup> henceforward referred to as the *Purpose and Date*, has placed the study of the Vallum on a new and sound footing. It is no longer necessary to speculate as to its place in the sequence of development on the Roman frontier in the north of England; it is neither part of the same scheme as the Wall itself (as an earlier generation of antiquaries tried to explain it) nor (as Haverfield was once inclined to suggest) later than the Wall, but preceded the Wall both in construction and design. Further, the *Purpose and Date* showed that the Vallum was never intended to fulfil a defensive function comparable to that of a modern trench-system; it was not a defensive line, but the visible definition of the boundary of empire, that incidentally served as well to impede unauthorized crossing of the frontier, in that the ditch was an obstacle that would hinder its passage, and there were patrols from the forts to be reckoned with, who would be able to see and take steps to prevent attempts to cross the line.

The *Purpose and Date* was also concerned with the character and date of the system of crossings that Mr. Simpson had discovered. It will be as well to emphasize that the present paper is not intended to deal with any

<sup>1</sup> CW<sup>2</sup> XXII, pp. 353-433. In general, references given in that paper are not repeated here.

aspect of that problem. It will be sufficient to affirm that the place of the crossings in the general process of development has been fixed securely as a result of Mr. Simpson's researches; and as for their purpose, that is of little importance compared to the fact of their existence, and of their place: subsequent in point of time to the Vallum itself, and prior to the construction of the military way that completed the Wall scheme.

It is not with the subsequent changes in its structure then, but with the date of the Vallum itself, that we are concerned; and to understand the reasons that have led to the reconsideration of that problem, it will be necessary to recall the historical outline suggested in the *Purpose and Date*.<sup>2</sup> The sequence of events there assumed may be summed up as follows. The frontier in the north of England underwent a series of radical changes in the early years of the principate of Hadrian; following on the successful termination of the war in progress in Britain on his accession, the Vallum was dug, to connect a line of forts (of which some, if not all, were built as part of the same scheme), and to mark the formal frontier of the province. It was very soon found that the Vallum itself, as an obstacle, was insufficient to prevent raiders crossing the frontier, and it became necessary to enlarge some of the existing forts, to accommodate the more numerous garrison that was needed to put a check on such raiders. The measure proved insufficient; and so the Wall was built—as an afterthought—to connect the existing forts, in such a way as to make it virtually impossible for unauthorized crossings to occur.

The period of this sequence, from Vallum with small forts, through Vallum with enlarged forts, to the stone Wall, was limited to eight or nine years at the most; for A. Platorius Nepos, governor from A.D. 122 onwards,<sup>3</sup> appears on the inscriptions that record the building of

<sup>2</sup> pp. 391-6.

<sup>3</sup> The new diploma for that year (JRS XX, pp. 16-23) shows that he had just succeeded Pompeius Falco as governor.

four milecastles, and even if these inscriptions belonged to the very end of his governorship, we could hardly place them later than 127. So much for the end of the period; its beginning could hardly be earlier than 118, since the British war that Hadrian was called to deal with at his accession would be to put an end to first; and the coins, indeed, that commemorate its successful conclusion cannot be dated earlier than 119, and may be as late as 121. That is to say, we have from 118 to 127 at the outside, and on the balance of probability a year or two less at either end, for the transition from no frontier at all to the finished stone Wall.

From the first, it has been felt that so rapid a succession of changes is surprising, and difficult to account for; particularly as there is no historical record of trouble (later than that of which we learn at Hadrian's accession) that might provide the occasion for a complete change in the frontier system, within so short a time of the establishment of the Vallum; but the early years of Hadrian appeared, till recently, to be the earliest possible time for the Vallum's construction. In the first place, Spartian's account seemed, in conjunction with such evidence as was available from other provinces, to show that Hadrian was the first to make frontiers of the barrier type, as opposed to the simple road with forts along its course. Secondly, Sir George Macdonald had shown reason, in his paper on *The Agricolan occupation of north Britain*,<sup>4</sup> for supposing that the Roman hold on Scotland was not loosened until thirty years or more had passed after Agricola left Britain, and that the war at the beginning of Hadrian's principate might have been the occasion of Scotland being lost. It appeared then as though Hadrian was the originator of the class of frontier-work to which the Vallum belongs; and that until his time, Roman Britain extended north of Cheviot, so that there could be no occasion for constructing a new frontier earlier. Hence the assumption of a very brief period for the develop-

<sup>4</sup> JRS IX, pp. 111-38.

ments that culminated in the building of the Wall appeared unavoidable.

But it can no longer be assumed that Hadrian was the originator of the new type of frontier. In his article on *limes* in Pauly-Wissowa's *Realencyclopädie*,<sup>5</sup> our honorary member, professor Fabricius, has shown convincingly that the Roman Wall in the Dobruja dates to the time of Domitian.<sup>6</sup> It was probably established in 87, as a mainly defensive line, behind which the army of Moesia could recuperate after the disaster to Cornelius Fuscus and his force, until in 89 Tettius Iulianus led them across the Danube again, this time to victory over the Dacians. For about a dozen years thereafter, professor Fabricius suggests, the Dobruja line was held by a greatly reduced garrison, until in 101 Trajan established the fifth legion *Macedonica* at Troesmis, more than fifty miles to the north, and the Domitianic frontier was abandoned. Now in form the Moesian Wall bears a close—indeed, a startling—resemblance to the mid-second-century Wall of Antoninus Pius in Scotland. As originally laid out, it was an earth or turf wall, between forty and fifty feet wide at the base, and rising to a maximum height of over twelve feet; and its garrison was housed in cohort- or ala-forts, at intervals of about a mile, all but three abutting on its south face, while those three were placed a short distance in its rear. If a frontier of this type may be attributed to the time of Domitian, it will be seen that there can no longer be any *a priori* argument against an earlier date than the principate of Hadrian for the formation of the Vallum.

Then we must reconsider the length of the first occupation of Scotland, in the light of recent advances in the study of decorated samian ware.<sup>7</sup> Excavations on many sites—particularly in Wales, but also in our own

<sup>5</sup> XIII, cols. 572-671, especially 647-649.

<sup>6</sup> Col. 649; the decisive evidence comes from the fortress at Troesmis.

<sup>7</sup> The following paragraphs summarize conclusions, the evidence for which the writer hopes to discuss in conjunction with Dr. Davies Pryce elsewhere in the near future; he takes this opportunity of acknowledging his indebtedness to Dr. Pryce in formulating the present summary.

district—have greatly increased our knowledge of the developments and changes in the samian imported into Britain in the half-century following on the governorship of Agricola. In brief, the conclusion may be stated that the south Gaulish factories, that had supplied the bulk of the imports of samian ware to this country from the Claudian invasion onwards, began to lose their hold on the British market towards the close of the first century. Increasing mass-production (reflected in a rapid decline in the artistic quality of their products) failed to enable the potters of La Graufesenque to retain a market invaded by the nearer factories of central Gaul; and after A.D. 100 south Gaulish imports had virtually come to an end. Their place was taken by the early wares of Libertus and other Lezoux masters, and of the distinctive group of potters who are generally thought to have worked at Vichy.<sup>7a</sup> From about 90 (when they began to invade the British market) or 100 (when they appear to have secured the bulk of it) until 120, these new factories held the field: until the great mass-producing firms of Lezoux (faced, perhaps, with increasing competition from the cheaper wares of potteries in eastern Gaul and Germany) began to impose the monotonous mediocrity of a Cinnamus or a Paternus in place of the fine detail, and the delight in minute ornamentation, that distinguish the products of the Vichy group of potters.

From about 100, then, the latter factories held the British market; by 120 their hold had weakened or gone, for their wares appear only as survivals on Hadrian's Wall; the time of their first securing that market appears from a consideration of the samian ware found in Scotland. The Scottish evidence is surprisingly clear. The latest phase of south Gaulish production (that we have dated to the period after 100) is not represented by a single certain specimen in Scotland. That is not in itself decisive, for in the whole of Britain south Gaulish wares of this date and type are very uncommon: it is only at

<sup>7a</sup> Cf. T. D. Pryce in *Ant. Journ.* X, pp. 344-55.

Richborough in recent years that we have come to recognize them. But of the penultimate phase, assigned to about 90-100, Scotland has barely a dozen pieces to show, and of the products of the central Gaulish factories in this period of change, the writer knows of only a single Scottish piece—one in the style of Libertus, from Newstead.<sup>8</sup> But south of Cheviot, all is changed. Carlisle, Nether Denton, Chesterholm, Chesters and Corstopitum, have produced both late south Gaulish and Trajanic central Gaulish wares to which as yet Scotland has no parallel to show; and the story seems to be similar on every site to the south from which samian in any quantity has come. It is impossible to believe that the Scottish garrisons were able to do without replacements of crockery for nearly thirty years, while their comrades south of Cheviot experienced the normal amount of breakages; and we are forced, on a study of the samian evidence, to assume that Scotland had been abandoned by the year 100.

Straightway, it is necessary to re-examine the evidence for the dates of the frontier works in the north of England, for it is inconceivable that after the abandonment of Scotland, there should be no attempt to form a frontier, in a period of constant attention to frontier-definition in other provinces—a period, moreover, when inscriptions and other evidence give reason for supposing that the army of Britain was engaged on a regular programme of building-operations, that attests close attention to the military needs of the province.<sup>9</sup>

It is some years now since the writer drew attention to the evidence relating to the line of the Stanegate;<sup>10</sup> it will be sufficient to repeat, that the samian from the forts on its line appears to begin where the Scottish material leaves off; and we may assume that by A.D. 100 a road

<sup>8</sup> p. 213, no. 6.

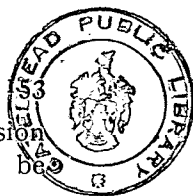
<sup>9</sup> It would be out of place to enlarge on this point here, but reference may be made to the building-records from Caerleon, York, Gellygaer, and Castell Collen. The writer hopes to deal with the question more fully elsewhere.

<sup>10</sup> AA<sup>4</sup> VIII, pp. 186-9; cf. also R. H. Forster in AA<sup>3</sup> XII, pp. 268-9.

and fort *limes* had been constructed between Tyne and Solway. To that extent, therefore, the pressure of development under Hadrian has been eased; we must now consider whether it is possible to assign any other part of the frontier-works to an earlier time.

We have seen that there are two general reasons for re-opening the question of the date of the Vallum, and have found that on general grounds it might be earlier than the time of Hadrian; there is one special reason for suggesting an earlier date. Whatever the interval of time between Vallum and Wall, messrs. Simpson and Shaw pointed out that the change could not have been made lightly; there must have been some compelling reason, such as warfare of a scale to demonstrate the insufficiency of the earlier scheme. But there was the difficulty, that the only recorded war was that in being in Britain at Hadrian's accession; and *ex hypothesi* that war must be the prelude to the Vallum frontier. Hence it became necessary to postulate a second period, not of full-scale war indeed, for that should surely have called forth some notice in the records of the period, scanty though they are, but of enemy pressure on the Vallum line. If it could be shown, it was urged, that the garrisons on that line had to be increased in size, after its erection, and before the planning of the Wall, then the fact of such pressure could be taken as demonstrated, and the reason for the adoption of a new frontier-system—the Wall—discovered. Now a dozen years ago it did seem that evidence for such an increase in the garrison existed. Some forts, it was thought, had been enlarged (Birdoswald for example, or Chesters): others (such as Greatchesters) added; in all these cases the form of the fort, and the relation of its ditch-system to the Wall, suggested that it had existed before the Wall scheme was devised. But subsequent research (in the main, research by Mr. Simpson himself) has largely disproved what once seemed clear and convincing evidence; we can no longer assume an enlarging of forts, and in con-

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sequence the explanation advanced for the supersession of a Hadrianic Vallum by a Hadrianic Wall has to be abandoned.

In the first place, Chesters and the forts similar to it in type (Rudchester, Benwell, Burgh-by-Sands, and presumably Haltonchesters) seem to have been built to house each a cavalry regiment five hundred strong, the same strength as was housed in smaller forts (such as Greatchesters or Carrawburgh) where there was an infantry garrison. So that even if at these sites there were evidence for the enlarging of Vallum forts, that enlarging might imply no more than the substitution of a cavalry for an infantry regiment. But the evidence that was once held to point to the enlarging of Vallum forts before the Wall was planned has now been explained otherwise; and it seems possible to suppose that all the existing forts belong, in their entirety, to the Wall scheme. Birdoswald fort, it is now clear, is wholly of the stone Wall period; the Vallum fort there was different in size and type and alinement.<sup>11</sup> Greatchesters, again, in original plan falls to the broad Wall phase (itself an episode undreamt of when the *Purpose and Date* was written), and in execution to that of the narrow Wall.<sup>12</sup> Housesteads fort, as we now know it, has been shown to belong to the Wall scheme, though its perimeter had been completed before the Wall itself was brought up to it.<sup>13</sup> There remain to be considered Chesters and the forts allied to it in their relationship to Vallum and Wall.

These forts all stand astride the Wall, which comes up to join them just south of their main east and west gates; and at first sight that fact itself might be taken to prove the prior existence, historically, of the forts; for how else could one account for the making of gateways only to be built up? But there are cogent arguments against supposing their prior historical (as opposed to prior structural) existence.

<sup>11</sup> CW<sup>2</sup> XXXIII, pp. 252-9, and XXXIV (forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> Collingwood, *Archæology of Roman Britain*, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> AA<sup>4</sup> X, pp. 83-5.

In the first place, it should be noted that they belong to exactly the same type—a stone-walled oblong, with six gateways—as Birdoswald Wall fort; and at Birdoswald the Vallum fort appears to have been a small square structure with clay ramparts. That is to say, in the one instance where we have certain knowledge of a Vallum fort, it is entirely unlike the existing forts of the Chesters type.

Next, the fort at Wallsend has been shown to belong, like Birdoswald, to the narrow Wall phase; it is of one build with the narrow Wall; yet its west gate, like the main side gates of the Chesters type, opens on to the berm of the Wall.<sup>14</sup> That is to say, in the one instance where we are certain of the point in time at which a fort that projects north of the Wall was built, it is at the building of the stone Wall in its closing, narrow phase.<sup>15</sup>

Then for the relationship between the Vallum and the forts: it has long been noted that there is a conspicuous lack of uniformity in the position of the forts in relation to the diversions of the Vallum or (to put it another way) in the line taken by the Vallum in relation to the existing forts. As Haverfield saw, it looks as though the Vallum were avoiding the general site, rather than the particular fort.<sup>16</sup> At Birdoswald, we know now that this was the case; and it is no longer unreasonable to suppose that at other sites also the fort that the Vallum turned south to avoid was other than the fort later incorporated in the Wall.

If the attribution of the existing forts to the same historical period as the Wall is accepted, it will be seen that it involves a considerable simplification in the sequence of developments. After the establishment of the Stanegate frontier, there are now three stages: the

<sup>14</sup> NCH XIII, p. 490. Presumably in the original lay-out the Wall ditch was not run in to the fort ditches, so that troops leaving the fort by the side gates would not be confined to the berm of the Wall.

<sup>15</sup> This must not be taken to imply that the other forts of this type were laid out so late in the scheme of development; at Chesters, Mr. Simpson tells me, the broad foundation is apparently later than the fort.

<sup>16</sup> CW<sup>1</sup> XIV, p. 419 *et al.*

Vallum and its forts; the broad Wall and most of the existing forts; and the change to the narrow Wall, with the addition of a few more forts. And instead of the time available being restricted to a decade at the outside, we have a period of twenty-five years or more for the changes to occur, while only the last two stages, clearly closely related to each other, need be assigned to the principate of Hadrian. If simplification is any merit, the hypothesis has at least that claim to attention.

But while such an outline of the sequence of changes considerably eases the pressure on the time available, the disappearance of the evidence for "enemy pressure" removes the only existing explanation for the supersession of the Vallum frontier by the Wall, unless we assume that it was the British war that directed Hadrian's attention to the problems of this frontier, and brought about the change of system. If, then, the Vallum was constructed before the close of Trajan's principate, we have ready to hand a reasonable historical explanation of its supersession by the Wall; but if we try to maintain its Hadrianic date, we should need to invent a fresh explanation.

At this stage it will be desirable, perhaps, to consider whether site-evidence allows the assumption of so early a date for the occupation of the Vallum forts. It is to be regretted that as yet the amount of positive evidence is of the slightest; otherwise their pre-Hadrianic date might have been apparent before now; but there is some evidence. Amongst the not inconsiderable yield of samian from deposits earlier than the existing fort at Birdoswald, there is a very marked contrast to the material attributable to the Hadrianic occupation. South Gaulish ware is sparsely represented, but early second-century central Gaulish specimens are numerous; and on general ceramic grounds a date in the neighbourhood of A.D. 110 appears to be most likely for the foundation of the Vallum fort there.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> It is to be hoped that the samian evidence may be published comparatively soon.

Chesters has produced pre-Hadrianic pottery (both south and central Gaulish), but in this case there is the presumption of an occupation of the site in connection with the Stanegate frontier. The same presumption does not yet hold good with Benwell, where a small group of pottery attributable to within a few years of A.D. 100 was found in the course of examining the causeway over the Vallum in 1933.<sup>18</sup>

There is thus a *prima facie* suggestion, at least, of a date in the middle of Trajan's principate; in passing, it may be observed that the assumption of such a date explains a feature which in the past has created difficulties. It has been urged that the Vallum does not constitute a very effective obstacle (though those of us who have seen its ditch cleared out at Birdoswald and Benwell recently may feel that in this respect its effectiveness has been underrated); but its apparent inferiority to the Wall is easier to understand if its construction fell after a period of peace, than if it formed a new frontier immediately after the conclusion of a severe war.

It will be seen that the writer cannot claim to have produced more than a fresh hypothesis, based on a consideration of the results of a dozen years' research by a number of people on many sites; that hypothesis he puts forward in part as an indication of the ways in which the problems of the Vallum appear to him to have been modified since the publication of the *Purpose and Date*: but also as a basis for further research. It is clearly necessary to do a lot more digging before the new hypothesis can be accepted—or rejected; at least, it may be claimed that a *prima facie* case has been made out for considering it, and testing it by excavation.

Vallum forts must be sought for at sites such as Rudchester or Housesteads where there is a presumption of their separate existence, and the relationship between some

<sup>18</sup> At least one piece of south Gaulish figured samian was found in the course of the earlier excavations at Benwell: AA<sup>4</sup> V, p. 64 and pl. xviii, no. 7.

of the existing forts (such as Chesters) and the Wall requires further attention paying to it. Again, the discovery of original roadways across the Vallum opens up a fresh field of research; at Rudchester, Haltonchesters, Chesters, perhaps Carvoran, and Burgh-by-Sands, it is to be hoped that such causeways will be looked for, and found, in the near future. In passing, the causeways show that the road that provided lateral communication for the Vallum frontier ran to the south of its line, as was suggested in the *Purpose and Date*.<sup>19</sup> The theory of the patrol-track<sup>20</sup> does not involve the assumption of a metalled road for wheeled traffic following the line later taken by the Wall; indeed, in some stretches, though the Wall is well sited for observation, its line is not good for rapid lateral communication: the course taken by the military way between Sewingshields and Carvoran shows its inadequacy in that respect. In the central sector, between North Tyne and Irthing, the Stanegate and branch-roads from it presumably formed the line for heavy traffic, although there were outposts here and there on the crags, and patrols moving along the line subsequently taken by the Wall. East of North Tyne, the connecting road still awaits discovery; Hodgson's Ald-he-way, if it can be traced, may provide a clue to it.<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, it remains for the writer to express his thanks to messrs. F. G. Simpson and I. A. Richmond, with whom he has discussed in detail most of the problems considered in this paper; but for their interest and friendly co-operation, the paper would never have appeared in its present form, as a re-statement of the historical setting of the Vallum, and an attempt to focus attention on the main outstanding problems connected with its place in the development of the frontier.

<sup>19</sup> p. 376.

<sup>20</sup> Collingwood, *Handbook to the Roman Wall* (9th edition), p. 21 et al.

<sup>21</sup> *History of Northumberland*, II, iii, p. 282.