

## VI.—THE LAST DAYS OF CORSTOPITUM AND THE ROMAN WALL—THE COIN EVIDENCE.

BY W. PERCY HEDLEY.

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In the report of the 1911 excavations at Corstopitum,<sup>1</sup> Dr. H. H. E. Craster discussed the value of the coin evidence on the date of the abandonment of Corstopitum by the Romans. Summarizing the evidence he suggested that the concealment of the hoard of gold *solidi* about A.D. 387 was "not likely to have long preceded the abandonment of Corstopitum." Dr. Craster marshalled his evidence in a careful manner and his conclusions are sound, on the basis of the data then existing. Recent work at Corstopitum by H.M. Office of Works and a careful checking of the coins found during the earlier excavations from 1906 to 1914 add very little to Dr. Craster's summary, but this little is perhaps of considerable importance, and warrants a further examination of the whole material. A brief chronology of the period from the accession of Valentinian I in 364 to the death of Theodosius I in 395 may be useful at the outset.

- 364. Accession of Valentinian I (26 Feb.) and association of Valens as joint emperor (28 March).
- 367. Gratian associated with Valentinian I and Valens (24 Aug.). Roman Wall overwhelmed by invaders from all sides.
- c.370. Restoration of the province by Count Theodosius.
- 375. Death of Valentinian I (17 Nov.); Valentinian II made Augustus (22 Nov.).

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<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Ael.*<sup>3</sup> VIII, pp. 238-241.

378. Death of Valens (9 Aug.).  
 379. Theodosius I associated as joint emperor (19 Jan.).  
 383. Death of Gratian (25 Aug.) and revolt of Magnus Maximus in Britain and Gaul. Arcadius made Augustus.  
 388. Death of Magnus Maximus (28 July).  
 392. Death of Valentinian II (15 May). Eugenius declared emperor.  
 393. Honorius made Augustus (20 Nov.).  
 394. Death of Eugenius (6 Sept.).  
 395. Death of Theodosius I (17 Jan.). No coins issued from the Gallic mints after this date.<sup>2</sup>

During the reigns of Valentinian I, Valens and Gratian (364-379) only three reverses were used on the copper coins.

1. GLORIA ROMANORVM. Emperor holding labarum dragging captive by hair r. From Corstopitum we have Val. I—65; Valens—66; and Gratian—22. Total—153
2. GLORIA NOVI SAECVLI. Emperor stg. with labarum, l. hand on shield. From Corstopitum Gratian—90. Total—90  
 This reverse was only struck by Gratian and only at the mint of Arelate.
3. SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE. Victory walking l., holding wreath and palm. From Corstopitum Val. I—71; Valens—172; Gratian—19. Total—262

No coins from the eastern mints of later date than 364 have been found at Corstopitum. We are therefore only concerned with the western mints (Arelate, Treveri and Lugdunum) and the central mints (Aquileia, Rome and Siscia).

Later reverses found at Corstopitum are the following :

4. REPARATIO REIPVB. This commences between 379 (accession of Theodosius) and 383 (death of Gratian). It was continued for a short time by Magnus Maximus, but not issued for Arcadius. The issue probably dates *c.* 379-383. The following have been found at Corstopitum—  
 Gratian. Lugdunum (2), Aquileia (1). Total—3

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<sup>2</sup> B. H. St. J. O'Neil in *Arch. Jour.* xc, pp. 282-285.

5. VOT XV MVLTV XX. This commemorates the completion of fifteen years reign by Gratian, which event happened on 24 Aug. 382. The issue would actually commence before 382 and might have been anticipated by two or three years. The issue therefore may be dated *c.* 379-383. From Corstopitum we have—

Gratian. Lugdunum (5), doubtful (1). Total—6

6. SPES ROMANORVM. Camp gate. Struck only by Magnus Maximus and his son Flavius Victor. It was issued from all the western and central mints with the exception of Siscia. Siscia was occupied by Maximus, but the mint was apparently dismantled about 387 and not re-opened. This issue may be dated 383-388. From Corstopitum we have—

Mag. Maximus. Lugdunum (1). Total—1

7. VICTORIA AVGGG. Victory advancing l. The three Augusti named in the legend are Valentinian II, Theodosius and Arcadius. The Victory may be identified with the overthrow of Maximus in 388. After the death of Val. II his place is taken by Eugenius. The issue continued until after the elevation of Honorius in 393. From Corstopitum we have—

Val. II. Arelate (2).

Theo. I. Arelate (1), Lugdunum (1).

Arcad. Arelate (3), Treveri (1). Total—8

Mr. Pearce has produced evidence to show that this issue was not struck after the death of Theodosius in 395.<sup>3</sup>

8. SALVS REIPVBLICAE. Victory and captive l. This reverse was issued from the mints of Rome and Aquileia by Val. II, Theodosius, Arcadius and Honorius. It does not occur at the western mints which were occupied by Magnus Maximus at the time of the beginning of the issue. Siscia struck only for Aelia Flacilla, the first wife of Theodosius. She died in Thrace in 386. As the issue includes coins for Val. II it must date before 392. Honorius, who was not made Augustus until 393, shares in the issue, which is therefore almost contemporary with VICTORIA AVGGG and can be dated from 386 shortly before the mint of Siscia was closed. The type seems to have lasted longer than the Victoria Auggg type, but only at the mint of Rome. From Corstopitum we have—

Val. II. None.

Theod. None.

Arcadius. Aquileia (1), Rome (2), uncertain (1).

Honorius. Rome (1). Total—5

The ratio between coins of Honorius and Arcadius at

<sup>3</sup> *Num. Chron.*, ser. v, no. 54, pp. 128-129.

Richborough was about 1 : 5. In the Icklingham and Weymouth hoards the proportions are 1 : 3 and 1 : 3½ respectively. At Corstopitum the proportion is 1 : 4, which is just about the ratio to be expected.

With the above information before us, it will be interesting to consider the late coin evidence from certain of the Wall forts and elsewhere in the north of England. For our purpose it is only possible to take into account Housesteads and Chesterholm, where coins have been found in recent years in some numbers. The coin reports from early excavations are quite unreliable; the report on 336 coins from Binchester in 1891 mentions two coins of Val. I and one of Gratian. It is not possible to identify any of these in the Binchester coins at Durham University, but amongst the latter, one coin described as Constantine I is actually Valentinian I, and two identified then as Licinius are of Valens.

At Housesteads out of a total coin list of 376 (viz. 1898 excavations—129; 1931-1935 excavations—247) only four coins of Valentinian I and Valens are recorded, and none of Gratian and later emperors. At Chesterholm forty-five coins have been found between 1932 and 1935. These include one of Valens and one of Valentinian II. The latter is of the *Salus Reipublicae* issue of 386-395 and of the mint of Rome. It may be as late in date as 392.

The Corstopitum evidence shows that the proportion of coins of the years 364-379 to those of later date is 21½ : 1. The absence of late coins from Wall sites is therefore easy to explain. Until over twenty-one coins of the emperors Val. I, Valens and Gratian have been found on a Roman Wall site we cannot expect to find a coin of later date. The absence of the latter cannot prove that the site was abandoned before A.D. 395. That coins of the period 364-379 were in normal circulation until the beginning of the fifth century can be shown from the constituents of several hoards. Of coins definitely later in date than 395, the coins of Constantine III (A.D. 408-411) are the latest to be

found in Britain. The Coleraine (Ireland) and Terling hoards can both be dated to this period, but the coins of this emperor are so exceedingly scarce that it is not surprising they have failed to be recorded from the Wall. Sir W. Ridgeway<sup>4</sup> suggested the origin of the Coleraine hoard as loot taken in Gaul by Neill "of the Nine Hostages." That it was loot is reasonably certain, but the more recent study of Theodosian hoards found in the south of England does away with the necessity of ascribing it to Gaul. Another factor is the probability that as the Wall forts were evacuated, no great number of contemporary coins would be left behind. A larger number is normally found where a site has been destroyed by enemy attack and not quietly abandoned.

The Yorkshire signal stations and other sites in that county have produced several coins of Honorius.<sup>5</sup> Copper coins of this emperor are recorded from Filey, Goldsborough, Scarborough and Whorlton. The signal station at Goldsborough at least appears to have been destroyed with its occupants, and it may be that these stations were garrisoned by local militia (as has been suggested for the Wall milecastles), and not evacuated with the rest of the British garrisons. The number of Theodosian coins from the signal stations is small "but may represent a somewhat longer period of occupation after 395 than is commonly inferred."<sup>6</sup>

To suggest because there are very few coins of Carus, Carinus and Numerian found on the Wall, that the Wall was only partially occupied in their time is quite as unreasonable as placing the evacuation in A.D. 395 because of the absence of later coins. If we had a few thousand coins of the period from Valentinian I instead of less than six hundred we might expect a coin of Constantine III amongst them.

<sup>4</sup> *Jour. Rom. Studies*, xiv, 130.

<sup>5</sup> *Arch. Jour.* xc, pp. 302/3.

<sup>6</sup> *London and the Saxons*, p. 46n.

British coin hoards of date later than A.D. 388 have produced over 34,000 coins,<sup>7</sup> and the most likely date for the deposition of most, if not all of them, is the time of the final Roman evacuation. The literary evidence gives us a date for this about 407 or 410, and the coin evidence is in complete agreement. It is therefore not necessary to postulate any earlier date for the Wall evacuation from the evidence of the coins. We cannot visualize Roman currency arriving in the north of England after the province had been severed from Roman control by the withdrawal of the garrison.

The worn condition of both Valentinian and Theodosian coins found on Roman sites in England has more than once been commented on. At Cirencester "the unusually large proportion of illegible and only partly legible coins is due not only to their careless striking but mainly to their worn condition, which suggests a somewhat prolonged continuance of the civil life of Corinium after the Roman evacuation."<sup>8</sup> At Silchester "the Theodosian coins seem to show signs of prolonged use."<sup>9</sup> At Carrawburgh a hoard of eighty-two barbarous coins was found in 1872; amongst them were two official coins of Valentinian I and Valens. Dr. Milne's opinion of these is that "the evidence at present available would suggest that the coins of Valentinian had been in use for about half a century."<sup>10</sup> The Valentinian coins from Corstopitum are in many cases in a similar worn condition, and there seems little doubt that many Roman sites in the north of England continued to be occupied well into the fifth century by what may be conveniently termed a sub-Roman population.

An account of the late Roman coinage found at Corstopitum would not be complete without some reference to the barbarous imitations of Roman coins which have

<sup>7</sup> *Arch. Jour.* xc, pp. 300-303.

<sup>8</sup> *Num. Chron.* v, pp. 332-334.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 35-36, pp. 328-332.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 50, pp. 82-84.

turned up on the site. From the time of the monetary reform of Aurelian (A.D. 272) barbarous issues of coins from local mints were current with the official coinage, but the irregular issues of the latter part of the third century can normally be distinguished from those of sub-Roman time by their considerably larger size and nearer approach to their prototypes. Towards the close of the fourth century the scarcity of metal tended to diminish the size of the coins, until the normal copper coinage reached the *minim* size under the Theodosian emperors. Barbarous imitations of this size are quite common at Corstopitum, and range from copies of *antoniniani* of Tetricus and Claudius Gothicus, through the *Urbs Roma* and *Constantinopolis* issues of Constantine I and his sons, to the *Fel.Temp.Reparatio* series of Constans and Constantius II. The Corstopitum *minims* do not normally reach the minute size of the Lydney coins, but compare very well with those from Richborough. There seems little doubt that they supplemented the regular Roman coins still in circulation in the fifth century.

It may be pointed out that Corstopitum and Carlisle are the only two Roman sites in close contact with the Wall that have preserved even a portion of their Roman names. The Roman Luguvallium became the *Caer Luel* (*Carlisle*) of its later Celtic occupants. Corstopitum had preserved so much of its Roman name that its site became known to the later Anglian settlers as *Corchester*, and their town on the neighbouring hill to the eastward became *Corabrig*e (*Corbridge*).

The date of the establishment of the Anglian kingdom of Northumbria is given in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as A.D. 547. The Anglian occupation of Corbridge may well have been much later than this. At the least we have a period of 150 years during which the Roman name, in part at least, survived the withdrawal of the Roman legions. Such a survival postulates a continuance of local life, almost certainly on the site of the Roman town. The

discovery of two late fifth century cruciform *fibulae* at Corstopitum<sup>11</sup> and an undoubted Anglo-Saxon urn<sup>12</sup> might well be taken as further evidence of such continued occupation.

<sup>11</sup> *Arch. Ael.*, 3rd ser., v, p. 407.

<sup>12</sup> *P.S.A.N.*, 2nd ser., xxiii, p. 489.