

## VI.—VIRIUS LUPUS

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The dating of the four Hadrian's Wall periods, first enunciated over forty years ago, seemed at one time to have attained a canonical position.<sup>1</sup> This is no longer the case, at least as regards period I. Sub-division into Ia, Ib and even Ic has of course been an added refinement, and there has been disagreement for some while over the relationship between Hadrian's Wall Ib (and Ic) and Antonine Wall II. But it is only very recently that there has been any open challenge to the accepted view that Hadrian's Wall I ended in A.D. 196/197. In S. Frere's *Britannia* (1967), which from the moment of its publication has become the standard history of the province, the orthodox version is presented, that Albinus crossed to Gaul "with as large an army as he could raise in Britain" and that "the bulk of the forces holding Hadrian's Wall and its vicinity were removed", with the result that there was widespread destruction: "on the recovery of Britain the government of Severus was faced throughout the military zone with the need to expel the enemy and to restore its military installations ... Hadrian's Wall itself had been extensively damaged" (168f.). Similarly, the second edition of R. G. Collingwood's *Archaeology of Roman Britain*, revised by the late Sir I. A. Richmond (1969) does not question the standard view (cf. p. 86).

<sup>1</sup> Ever since the excavations of 1928-1929 at Birdoswald, in fact, which produced the building-inscriptions of Severus and Diocletian (*RIB* 1909 and 1912), see F. G. Simpson and I. A. Richmond, "Excavations on Hadrian's Wall in Cumberland", *CW*<sup>2</sup> 30 (1930) 169-205; cf. E. Birley, *Research on Hadrian's Wall* (1961) 200f., 264; *id.*, "Hadrian's Wall", *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, Quaderno n. 150 (1971) 37-45 (with pl. III.3).

The assumption that the destruction, which was followed by rebuilding under Severus, took place in the years 196-7, was based partly on the *a priori* argument that as Albinus clearly took away virtually the entire garrison, the province and its frontier in particular must have lain unprotected for many months. But there was, further, a specific piece of evidence in an excerpt from Cassius Dio's *History*: "[Dio says] that on account of the Caledonii not having kept their promises, and having made preparations to assist the Maeatae, and on account of the fact that Severus was then giving attention to the Parthian war, Lupus was compelled to buy peace from the Maeatae for a great sum of money, receiving back some few prisoners" (74.5.4). It was emphasised by B. R. Hartley in 1966, reasonably enough to be sure, that it was "the discovery of a rebuilding inscription not earlier than 205 at Birdoswald" which led to this passage in Dio being interpreted as evidence that the province had been invaded, with widespread destruction, in 196-197. "Is it possible to believe that the Wall lay in ruins for at least eight years?", asks Mr. Hartley.<sup>2</sup> Five years later Mr. Hartley has asked this question again: "The orthodox view ... is obviously perfectly possible, but it does leave some facts unexplained or in doubt. The recovery of the Pennine area and the re-establishment of the forts there in A.D. 197-8 and the following years is not in doubt. But it also seems certain that Virius Lupus was building at Corbridge. Why, then, should the restoration of the Wall have to wait until A.D. 205 or later? ... It still seems a little difficult to visualise a situation in which the frontier of the province could have been allowed to lie in ruin for so long."<sup>3</sup>

Others have expressed similar doubts. Thus M. G. Jarrett, in 1967: "wenn 197 das Datum für die Zerstörung ist, erscheint es merkwürdig, dass wir keine Anzeichen

<sup>2</sup> "Some problems of the Roman military occupation of the north of England", *Northern History* 1 (1966) 7-20, 18ff.

<sup>3</sup> "Roman York and the northern military command", *Soldier and Civilian in Roman Yorkshire*, ed. R. M. Butler (1971) 55-69, 64.

für eine Wiedererrichtung vor der Amtzeit des Alfenus Sencio, die ein Jahrzehnt später liegt, haben".<sup>4</sup> More recently, together with J. C. Mann, Dr. Jarrett has argued this point in some detail<sup>5</sup>; while Dr. Mann has also combined with J. P. Gillam to express the same critical view, in another context, in this journal.<sup>6</sup> The Jarrett-Mann and Gillam-Mann views are more or less identical, as might be predicted from the dual role of Dr. Mann; Mr. Hartley's position is rather different.<sup>7</sup> But what all four scholars have in common is that they dispute that there was an invasion and destruction in A.D. 196/7 and argue that the damage was done subsequently, *ca.* A.D. 205 or a little later. This is based principally on Herodian (3.14.1): "While Severus was upset at his sons' way of life and their inappropriate enthusiasm for the shows, the governor of Britain wrote to him, saying that the barbarians were in rebellion, and, overrunning the land, were carrying off booty and causing great destruction. There was therefore need for larger forces to strengthen the area, or for the imperial presence." The message led Severus to launch the *expeditio felicissima Britannica* (RIB 1143), initiated as is well-known by his arrival in A.D. 208.<sup>8</sup> This evidence looks clear-cut, and, what is more, it is very much in harmony, one might think, with what Dio states in the same chronological context, that

<sup>4</sup> "Aktuelle Probleme der Hadriansmauer", *Germania* 45 (1967) 96-105, 100.

<sup>5</sup> M. G. Jarrett and J. C. Mann, "Britain from Agricola to Gallienus", *Bonner Jahrbücher* 170 (1970) 178-210, hereafter cited as Jarrett-Mann.

<sup>6</sup> J. P. Gillam and J. C. Mann, "The Northern British Frontier from Antoninus Pius to Caracalla", *AA* 48 (1970) 1-44, hereafter cited as Gillam-Mann.

<sup>7</sup> Note especially that they diverge on the dating of period II of the Antonine Wall.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. Birley, *Septimius Severus, the African Emperor* (1971), esp. 253ff. (hereafter cited as Birley, *Severus*). I may be permitted to draw attention to p. 299 n. 1: "It seems to have become fashionable to deny the 196-7 destruction—yet the case against it has never been cogently argued (in print at least). I await it with interest, although a careful and repeated examination of the evidence makes me doubt whether a real case can be made." The appearance of Gillam-Mann and Jarrett-Mann now makes it necessary for me to take up the challenge. I must add that in one or two matters I have modified the position taken in *Severus*, e.g. esp. regarding Herodian 3.14.1 (p. 244 and cf. p. 187f, below).

Severus was angry that while he was making vain attempts to deal with a brigand in Italy, "he was winning victories through others in Britain" (76.10.6). "We may reasonably link this", write Jarrett and Mann, "with an inscription of Alfenus Senecio from Benwell, a dedication to Victoria Augg. by ala I Asturum. Also relevant may be an altar to dea Victoria Brigantia from Greetland (Yorks.) dated to 208."<sup>9</sup>

Let us return to the excerpt dealing with the difficulties in which Virius Lupus found himself, for both Gillam-Mann and Jarrett-Mann discuss it at considerable length. First, the Caledonian "promises". On this Jarrett and Mann write: "apparently some Roman official had made a treaty with the Caledonians, but not with the Maeatae. The Maeatae had initiated the opposition to Rome. It may be that, as Mr. Gillam has suggested, the territory of the Maeatae in Fife and Strathmore was regarded as part of the Roman province in this period; in this case Virius Lupus was faced with a rebellion rather than an external war. We cannot now name the official who had made a treaty with the Caledonians. Albinus seems to be the most likely, in view of the reference to the Parthian War."<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to see why Albinus should seem the most likely. After all, only a dozen years earlier Ulpus Marcellus had "inflicted terrible harm on the barbarians in Britain" (Dio 72. 8. 1-5), as a result of which Commodus had taken the title *Britannicus* in A.D. 184 and a seventh salutation as *imperator*.<sup>11</sup> Surely it will have been Marcellus who imposed a treaty, as indeed Gillam and Mann recognise: "The 'promises' . . . were either those conditions which presumably had been imposed upon them by Ulpus Marcellus, or possibly part of some arrangement which they had made with Clodius Albinus . . ."<sup>12</sup> But why must one assume that only the Caledonians had had terms imposed, and not the Maeatae? If one compares analogous

<sup>9</sup> Jarrett-Mann 198f.

<sup>10</sup> *ib.* 196f.

<sup>11</sup> *ib.* 194.

<sup>12</sup> Gillam-Mann 40.

passages elsewhere in Dio, one finds a case in the 170s A.D. where "this tribe [sc. the Astingi] really did keep their promises, but the Cotini, although they said they would do likewise ... failed to do so" (Dio 71. 12. 1-3), i.e. Dio is speaking of two tribes' differing behaviour towards Rome in respect of their treaty obligations. In other words, it is perfectly feasible that Dio's original account of events in Britain in 196-197 may have related how the Maeatae broke their promises, *and* how the Caledonii, by making preparations to aid them, a little afterwards broke their promises too. Those who wish to discount Dio's description of Lupus' dealings with the Maeatae do indeed recognise that we possess only an isolated fragment, "a detached excerpt"<sup>13</sup> But they go much beyond this caution when they claim that "if Britain was in fact suffering from barbarian invasion in February 197, it is difficult to understand why Severus did not visit the province himself, or at least send sufficient troops to deal with the crisis."<sup>14</sup> Or, alternatively, at greater length: "The man who, although old and ill, prosecuted the campaigns of 209 and 210 with such vigour and determination is hardly likely to have gone off to the Parthian campaign in 197, leaving a situation of such weakness in Britain. There is no evidence that the Parthian situation was so pressing that it had to be dealt with immediately after the defeat of Albinus, but even if it were, the Parthian campaign was over by 199 at the latest, and no pressing problem, military or otherwise, presented itself to Severus in the intervening years, until the British campaigns of 209 and 210. It is difficult to imagine this energetic man allowing his governors to struggle for so long to restore the situation in northern Britain. He would surely have seen to it that the frontier system was fully restored long before the governorship of Alfenus Senecio."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Jarrett-Mann 196.

<sup>14</sup> *ib.* 197.

<sup>15</sup> Gillam-Mann 41f.

Presented with such an array of *a priori* arguments, it is difficult to know where to begin, but it will be simplest to take the case, as more fully set out in the second quotation, and answer it point by point. "There is no evidence that the Parthian situation was so pressing": how can this claim be justified in the face of Dio's clear evidence that during the war against Albinus the new province of Mesopotamia had been invaded and that its capital Nisibis had very nearly been taken by siege?<sup>16</sup> The blow to Severus' and Rome's prestige that would have resulted from the loss of a province so recently annexed—and, what is more, a province that Trajan had once created and that Hadrian had abandoned—would have by far outweighed anything that the northern British barbarians could do to a province that had actively supported his rival and for the time being might be left to suffer a little longer. Severus went to the east with lightning speed, and victory was claimed on 28 January 198, a date of enormous significance, for it marked the centenary of the *dies imperii* of Trajan, the *optimus princeps*; it appears from the *feriale Duranum* that Severus on that day gave over the Parthian capital to the sword, assumed the title Parthicus Maximus and his eleventh and last salutation as *imperator*, and formally made his elder son Augustus.<sup>17</sup> The value to him of such a victory was very great indeed. How could anything in Britain compare with it? Not only was there prestige throughout the literate and vocal Greek half of the empire, in particular; there was, too, it would seem, material increment to the revenues of Rome from the booty taken at Ctesiphon.<sup>18</sup> "But even if it were [so pressing], the Parthian campaign was over by 199 at the latest, and no pressing problem, military or otherwise, presented itself ...

<sup>16</sup> Birley, *Severus* 183f., 198, 201f.

<sup>17</sup> See J. Guey, "28 janvier 98-28 janvier 198, ou le siècle des Antonins", *Revue des études anciennes* 50 (1948) 60ff. The date is given in the *Feriale Duranum*, col. i, line 14, cf. C. B. Welles et al., *Dura-Europos Final Report*, V.1, The Parchments and Papyri (1959) 198; note also Dio 75.9. 3-4; H.A. *Severus* 16. 1-5.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. T. Pekáry, "Studien zur römischen Währungs- und Finanzgeschichte von 161-235 n. Chr.", *Historia* 8 (1959) 443ff., 458.

until the British campaigns of 209 and 210.”<sup>19</sup> This is surely to carry insularity to extremes. What of the emperor’s tour of Egypt in 199 and 200, which had so many important consequences for that vital and unique province? What of the *decennalia*, the tour of his native Africa (including military operations on the borders of Tripolitania), the overthrow of Plautianus and the consequent political upheaval?<sup>20</sup> Can none of these items be dignified with the label of “pressing”? Finally, “It is difficult to imagine [Severus] allowing his governors to struggle so long to restore the situation”.<sup>21</sup> To restore *what* situation? one must ask. Gillam and Mann and Jarrett and Mann will have it that the northern frontier from A.D. 184 was the Antonine Wall (a view which the present writer would like to be able to follow); but that this frontier remained untouched until *ca.* A.D. 207. Yet if one accepts that Antonine Wall II did indeed begin in A.D. 184, but accepts also that there was destruction in A.D. 196-7—affecting installations on *both* Walls—will the mandate of Virius Lupus and his successors not have been to restore the Antonine frontier rather than the Wall of Hadrian? Would not this explain the situation, “inconceivable” to critics of the 196-7 dating, of a gap of “eight years or more” between destruction on Hadrian’s Wall and rebuilding under Senecio? Why should Lupus and Pudens, or indeed any other governor there may have been between these two, have wasted time on Hadrian’s Wall, if their instructions were to take the frontier back to the Forth-Clyde line? Or indeed (why not?) to resume the policy of Julius Agricola, and dispense with the need for a linear frontier at all? Such considerations cannot, at any rate, be left out of account. And there is an alternative and even more obvious reflection: can we really be sure that evidence will never come to hand of Lupus and Pudens rebuilding at Housesteads, Chesters, Birdoswald itself, or anywhere *per lineam valli*?

<sup>19</sup> Gillam-Mann 42.

<sup>20</sup> Birley, *Severus* 206ff., 214ff., 216ff., 224ff., 232ff.

<sup>21</sup> Gillam-Mann 42.

The answer must be that we cannot be sure and that such evidence may well appear. The argument that there was a gap of eight or more years between a destruction postulated in 196-197 and any rebuilding is, after all, an *argumentum ex silentio*, as is sometimes forgotten.

It is time to turn to the evidence of Herodian, the apparent positive indication of a disaster immediately prior to the *expeditio felicissima* itself. Herodian was for a considerable time overrated as an historian, especially by Rostovtzeff and the school of v. Domaszewski. Then a reaction set in and E. Hohl, in several acute papers, exposed his serious defects.<sup>22</sup> But he still has his defenders, and the appearance of the translation by C. R. Whittaker (vol. i, 1969, vol. ii, 1970), with its very detailed annotation, has added another. Yet for all Whittaker's sympathy for his author, even he cannot gloss over some of Herodian's serious mistakes. For example, he is quite ignorant of the fact that Severus waged two Parthian wars, in 195 and 197-199: not only does he conflate the two into a single war, but he places that war *after* the Saecular Games (which took place in A.D. 204) and *after* the granting of the title Augustus to Geta (which took place in A.D. 209). It is likewise crucial to an understanding of Herodian to observe his use of the rhetorical cliché: time after time, the same phrase is used for stock situations.<sup>23</sup> This clearly implies that one must exercise caution in pressing an exact meaning

<sup>22</sup> Cf. esp. his "Kaiser Commodus und Herodian", *Sitzb. d. Deutsch. Akad. d. Wiss. Berlin* 1954. 1, 3ff.; "Kaiser Pertinax und die Thronbesteigung seines Nachfolgers im Lichte der Herodiankritik", *ib.* 1956. 2, 3ff.

<sup>23</sup> See now especially the important series of papers by G. Alföldy: "Der Friedensschluss des Kaisers Commodus mit den Germanen", *Historia* 20 (1971) 84-109, esp. 86ff.; "Cassius Dio und Herodian über die Anfänge des neupersischen Reiches", *Rheinisches Museum* 114 (1971) 360-366; "Herodians Person", *Ancient Society* 2 (1971) 204-233; "Zeitgeschichte und Krisenempfindung bei Herodian", *Hermes* 99 (1971) 429-449; "Herodian über den Tod Mark Aurels", *Latomus* (forthcoming); "Bellum desertorum", *Bonner Jahrbücher* 171 (1971) 367-376; "Der Sturz des Kaisers Geta und die antike Geschichtsschreibung", *Historia-Augusta-Colloquium Bonn* (forthcoming). I am very grateful to Professor Alföldy for allowing me to consult these articles in advance of their publication.



out of Herodian's language; and his account of the British "crisis" of A.D. 207 is a case in point. For, it can be seen, comparison with other occasions when he has to describe the personal participation of an emperor in a war, shows that the phraseology comes out of his stock of clichés. It is true that Severus' Parthian war is not introduced in the same way, but the Persian and German wars of Severus Alexander are both prefaced by letters from governors, reports of incursions and ravaging, and a request for the imperial presence. The language is very similar in each case; clearly this is a stock *topos*—"the unexpected news of enemy invasion necessitates the emperor's departure on campaign".<sup>24</sup> To be sure, in the case of Severus Alexander's two campaigns, one cannot deny that there had been serious trouble, and that might be held to justify the seriousness of the damage done in Britain just before the imperial expedition of A.D. 208. Yet it must be noted that Herodian purports to give the sense of the governors' actual despatches

<sup>24</sup> One may compare the three passages:

Herodian 3.14.1: Just at this time, when Severus was upset by his sons' way of life and their indecent preoccupation with the shows, the governor of Britain sent a dispatch to say that the barbarians of the province were in a state of rebellion, laying waste the countryside, carrying off plunder and wrecking almost everything. The governor requested, therefore, that either the garrison should be strengthened to give the province protection, or that the emperor should come in person.

6.1.2. So for thirteen years Alexander ruled without cause for complaint as far as he himself was concerned. But in his [four]te[n]th year unexpected letters came from the governors of Syria and Mesopotamia, with information that Artaxerxes, king of the Persians, had defeated the Parthians, broken up their eastern kingdom and killed Artabanus, the previous king who wore the double crown ... He was causing unrest by refusing to be contained by the river Tigris and was crossing the banks which were the boundaries of the Roman empire. Mesopotamia was being overrun and Syria threatened ... 2.5 ... He pressed forward, ravaging the entire Roman territory, overrunning Mesopotamia with infantry and cavalry, and carrying off plunder ... 3.1 ... his eastern governors were demanding his presence.

6.7.2: But no sooner had Alexander made this calculation than dispatch-carriers and their communiques demoralised him and threw him into a greater state of anxiety. The message from the governors in Illyria was that the Germans were on the march across the Rhine and Danube, devastating the Roman empire, over-running the garrisons on the river banks, and also the cities and villages, with a large force and putting the Illyrians who bordered Italy as neighbours into considerable danger. Therefore, they said, the presence of Alexander and the entire army that was with him was essential.

in all three cases, and that in the Persian one, the governors of Syria and Mesopotamia apparently had to inform the emperor, not only that their provinces were in danger, but that the Parthians had been overthrown by the Persians, an event which took place *at least five years* before Alexander's expedition.<sup>25</sup> In other words, Herodian's practice makes it legitimate to conclude that the devastation in Britain of which he speaks, might—if he really knew of any devastation at all—have taken place well before A.D. 207, and could indeed perfectly easily refer back to A.D. 197. What he is doing here, after all, as he does so often, is uncritically to reproduce official propaganda. The Romans still loved to wage a *justum bellum* if they could; and there certainly would have been a convincing pretext. The official justification for the *expeditio felicissima Britannica* will not have been that Severus wished to give his sons a change of scene, and some military experience; that he was restless and still moved by *gloriae cupido*; that he thought he could solve the British problem for good by annexation. Rather it will have been that the barbarians had broken their treaties and caused damage, and must be punished.

A succession of governors had failed to achieve real success, although they may have won victories of a kind to whet the emperor's appetite. The last attested, Senecio, at any rate, had apparently given up all thoughts of regaining Scotland. The time was now ripe for the emperor himself. Before, he might have been risking the future of his reign and his dynasty by crossing the Channel. Now, he felt he had not long to live (Dio 76. 11. 1-2); and he could take measures to ensure the armies' loyalty in his absence.<sup>26</sup> What of Senecio's dedication to *Victoria Augg* at Benwell (RIB 1337)? Alas, that need have no reference to any achievement by Senecio himself, or indeed to Britain at all.

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the Persian attack on the Parthians began in A.D. 222/223, see N. C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia* (1938) 268ff.; *RE* Supp. 9 (1962) cols. 182f.; the end of Parthian resistance came at latest in A.D. 228/229.

<sup>26</sup> Birley, *Severus* 252f.

It *might*, of course, have been set up in A.D. 208 or 209, after the emperors had arrived. But it is perfectly possible, indeed probable, that it was one of a series set up in A.D. 207 to mark the anniversary of the great *victoria Parthica*.<sup>27</sup> As for the Greetland altar to *Victoria Brigantia* (RIB 627) of A.D. 208, that can surely refer to initial suppression of the Brigantian hillmen after the expedition had been launched.

The purpose of this article is not to attempt to block any new thinking on the history of Hadrian's Wall and to cling desperately to the old views. It may indeed be the case that there was damage on Hadrian's Wall early in the reign of Commodus and—though on a lesser scale than Herodian suggests—all over the north *ca.* A.D. 207. But why should there not also have been damage in 196-197, when the army was not there to protect the province? The governor Lupus had to pay out "great sums of money to get peace". If he only obtained back "a few prisoners" that does not necessarily mean that the Maeatae had only taken a few: it could equally mean that Lupus was in no position to get any more back. The natural interpretation of Dio 74.5.4 is surely that the Maeatae had invaded the province and that Lupus had to buy them off.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. for example *CIL* III 11082, Arrabona (A.D. 207).

