

# I

## Hadrian's Wall in its Imperial Setting

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This paper presents a slightly revised version of a lecture delivered to the Society in August 1989, on the occasion of the Hadrian's Wall Pilgrimage; its purpose to consider the setting within which Hadrian's Wall belongs, to put it in its place, both geographically and chronologically. Geographically, particular attention is paid to those frontier complexes with which Hadrian's Wall may be most closely compared, to the north-western provinces and to other "artificial" frontiers: chronologically attention is focused on the Hadrianic period in particular, and on the second century in general.

The form which Hadrian's Wall took make it stand out as the most physically extravagant, and superficially the strongest of the frontier lines of the Roman world. The elaborate, some would say, "over-elaborate", nature of the structure has been explained variously as a reflection of the gravity of the military situation in Britain, as "displacement activity" arising from the need somehow to occupy the energies of an army no longer occupied in warfare, or as a Hadrianic "ego-trip", the desire to create a permanent memorial to himself by an emperor whose policies meant that he would not be remembered as a great general doing what a general should be doing—winning great victories and expanding the bounds of the Roman world. Unique in the solidity of its structural form, Hadrian's Wall is not, however, unique in what it represents. It falls into place as one particular regional manifestation of a consistent Empire-wide frontier policy, in which aggressive expansion was eschewed in favour of consolidation within the existing boundaries. These boundaries might be marked by "natural" features, taking the form of rivers, mountains or deserts; but where no such natural demarcation existed, artifice had to be employed, and employed in a way which,

inevitably, reflected the problems of geography (both human and physical), geology and topography peculiar to the individual regions in which they were constructed.

It is convenient to start with a view-point far distant in time and space from the preconceptions of 20th century Britain, a view expressed by a man who was alive when the Wall was built, but who came from the more "civilized" heartland of the Roman world, a provincial from the East, an inhabitant of Asia Minor, an admirer of Rome and all its doings. In the middle years of the second century Aelius Aristides, a citizen of Mysia on the Aegean coast of Asia, visited Rome and subsequently wrote an oration in praise of the City and its Empire. Among the things he admired was the manner in which Rome arranged for the defence of her territory. Firstly, she raised a well trained, full-time professional army, not from the inhabitants of Rome itself, who were freed from the levy, nor indeed from mercenaries, but from provincials. Secondly this army was stationed at the furthest bounds of the Empire: the Roman heartland was, in effect, demilitarised, its cities could safely be unwalled because the Empire itself was walled (Aelius Aristides, *Roman Oration*).

(78) (the army was led) to the boundaries of the Empire. There you stationed them at intervals, and you assigned areas to guard, some to some, others to others. . . .

(80) To place the walls around the city itself as if you were hiding her or fleeing from your subjects you considered ignoble and inconsistent with the rest of your concept, as if a master were to show fear of his own slaves. Nevertheless you did not forget walls, but these you placed around the Empire, not the City. And you erected walls splendid and worthy of you, as far away as possible, visible to those within the circuit, but,

for one starting from the city, an outward journey of months and years if he wished to see them.

(81) Beyond the outermost ring of the civilized world, you drew a second line, quite as one does in walling a town, another circle, more widely curved and more easily guarded. Here you built the walls to defend you and then erected towns bordering upon them . . . filling them with colonists, giving these the comforts of arts and crafts, and in general establishing beautiful order.

(82) An encamped army, like a rampart, encloses the civilized world in a ring . . . from the settled area of Aethopia to the Phasis [up by the Caucasus], and from the Euphrates in the interior to the great outermost island towards the West [viz. Britain] . . .

(84) But the ring much greater and more impressive, in every way altogether unbreachable and indestructible, outshines them all, and in all time there has never been a wall so firm. For it is a barrier of men who have not acquired the habit of flight. It is they who defend these ordinary walls.

(97) . . . the whole civilized world lays down the arms which were its ancient burden and has turned to adornment and all glad thoughts with power to realize them.

Aristides was born at the close of the militaristic age of Trajan. He lived through the generally peaceful years of Hadrian, Pius and Marcus when such military campaigns as did take place were, in the main, wars of defence. He was a great admirer of the philhellenic Hadrian whom he believed to have inaugurated a new Golden Age. The state of affairs which he saw, with settled frontiers and an army far-distaned from the civilized heart of the Empire, seemed to him altogether satisfactory. He and his type, men of letters and bigwigs in local government, could lead their lives undisturbed, unthreatened. The tone is one of total satisfaction with the status quo.

That is to say he was accepting, not grudgingly but as a matter of policy, as the true order of things, the fact that limits had been put upon the area of Rome's ascendancy, that the world was to be divided into Romans and non-Romans. The concept of *imperium sine fine*, of power without end, of world domination, which is reflected in the literature of the previous century, has gone by the board. The age of optimistic expansion is over. As John

Mann has argued (Mann 1974), the mere existence of static Roman frontiers, of Hadrian's Wall and its ilk, is a symbol, not, as is commonly perceived, of "the strength and dominance of Rome" but of "abdication and failure". Wherever a land frontier exists, and even, in time, a sea frontier, there lies an area of insecurity, an actual or potential administrative and military problem with the peoples who lie beyond. Even Spain, which Mann pointed to as the one area where Rome solved its "frontier problem" by eliminating it, that is by conquering as far as the sea shores, was, in time, troubled by Moors invading from over the sea, from north Africa. (And sea-borne raiding was, in the longer term, what was to happen in Britain too—Hadrian's Wall became irrelevant.)

Frontiers such as those described by Aristides, peopled with soldiers and cities, contain the seeds of their own destruction. Economic development in the frontier areas, such as Eric Birley argued many years ago (Birley 1956, 32) was one of the aims of Roman frontier policy, provides a magnet to draw outsiders in. And that, of course, is just what did happen, and it began not so long after Aristides wrote.

Acceptance of this failure to conquer the whole world is of course due in part to a more realistic appreciation of the extent of that world. However, the historian, Appian, a contemporary of Aristides, who, like him, came from the Hellenized parts of the Empire—in his case from Alexandria—was even able to argue that Rome had indeed conquered all that was worth conquering—an interesting rationalization of failure. "Possessing the best part of the earth and sea they have, on the whole, aimed to preserve their empire by the exercise of prudence, rather than to extend their sway indefinitely over poverty-stricken and profitless tribes of barbarians, some of whom I have seen at Rome offering themselves, by their ambassadors, as its subjects, but the emperor would not accept them because they would be of no use to him." (Appian, *Preface* 7)

Frontiers before Hadrian

Hadrian's decision to make no further adv-

ances, had the unavoidable corollary that attention had to be paid to the fringes of the Empire, to the points of interface between Roman and non-Roman. In some areas he was of course, in practice doing no more than consolidate a trend already set in train by his predecessors. In many provinces advance had long ago ground to a halt. In an empire as large as Rome's, no emperor, however militaristic, could advance on all fronts at once. While Trajan, an expansionist emperor if ever there was one, was advancing the bounds of the Empire beyond the Danube and the Euphrates, to the edges of the eastern and southern deserts, creating the new provinces of Dacia, of Greater Armenia and Arabia, and extending the southern limits of the province of Africa, in the North-West—in Britain, the two Germanies and Raetia—the armies remained static. They guarded the lands already in Roman hands, and were potentially poised to resume forward movement. But no such resumption came, not, that is, until after the death of Hadrian.

As long as the conquest of new territory was in view, as long as Rome's armies were perceived as mobile campaigning armies, static linear frontiers of the sort which the name of Hadrian's Wall conjures up, had no place in the order of things. Frontiers there must have been in a notional sense, frontiers between land that was Roman and land that, for the time being at least, was not. But within a dynamic military situation those frontiers were constantly shifting, the borders moving, campaign by campaign, season by season. In tribal warfare such as characterized the military action in much of what was to become the Empire, the army was not advancing on a single front against a single united enemy. The acquisition of new territory involved negotiation with friendly peoples as well as war with hostile ones: the boundaries of the Empire were extended by diplomacy, by peaceful negotiation, by bribery and by threat as well as by direct use of force.

The boundaries of a province would be co-extensive with the lands of those peoples who had submitted to Roman arms or diploma-

cy; it is doubtful if these transient borders were reflected at all precisely in Roman military dispositions. In the summer the troops were out in the field campaigning; in the winter they might well be pulled back to bases within secure territory where they might rest and recuperate in relative safety, not in the insecurity of hostile border terrain. It is only when forward movement ceases that static linear frontier dispositions start to evolve as the result of a need to police these potentially hostile border regions. Campaigning having ceased, the troops no longer need to be kept together in substantial battle groups, and the most effective way to control a linear frontier for bureaucratic purposes and against small-scale local threats, is to spread the army out along it, concentrating on weak spots, on crossing points, on existing routeways, for example.

Exactly when this transition came about varied, of course, from province to province. In the lower Rhineland close-spaced dispositions of forts along the left bank of the river are already appearing as early as the time of Claudius. Greater Germany, won and lost under Augustus, was never reoccupied. Tiberius took the advice of his war-weary predecessor and made no attempt to push back to the Elbe. The frontier settled on the Rhine. The auxiliary units, accommodated in the early days in and around the legionary bases, were being spread out in order to undertake frontier duties. For example in the area between the Rhine mouth and the junction of Rhine and Waal, forts were disposed at roughly 7 to 8 km intervals. The large, two-legion bases, a relic of the Augustan campaigning armies, were gradually phased out. Cologne went in the mid-30s, Xanten at the start of Flavian period, its demise precipitated by the events of the civil war of A.D. 69. Large troop concentrations, essential in time of war, constituted a potential danger in time of peace. In upper Germany, Mainz survived until the reign of Domitian; its garrison saw further aggressive warfare when first Vespasian and then Domitian sought to advance the limits of Roman control beyond the Rhine. Thereafter the frontier in this area too stabilized, and the legions were split up in

the wake of the Saturninus rebellion in 89. From now on the development of control of the German frontier was a gradual and continuous one, Hadrian, as we shall see, making no radical changes in policy, but building on what was already there.

In Britain conquest had, of course begun later, too late, that is, for the great forward thrust of early Augustan policy. A Claudian project, the conquest was something of a stop-go situation. It is a very good illustration of the way in which military policy is significantly influenced by the attitudes of individual emperors, by where their particular interests lay, as also by the military situations elsewhere in the Empire. Located as it was on the very edge of the known world, Britain could never enjoy any priority in imperial affairs. If a military threat closer to the heart of the Empire intervened, the security of Britain necessarily had a low claim, its troop numbers depleted as and when they were needed elsewhere.

The conquest of Britain was inaugurated with enthusiasm by Claudius, treated equivocally by Nero, but taken up again vigorously by Vespasian who had, as a legionary commander, won distinction in the early campaigns. The Tay had been reached by the time Vespasian died. If we are to believe Tacitus, the northern conquest was being achieved with minimal problems. And yet Titus, he intimates, thought about putting a stop to it: establishing a *terminus* within the island, siting *praesidia* (garrisons) across the Forth-Clyde isthmus (Tacitus, *Agricola* 23). A significant move indeed if we understand Tacitus correctly, for he implies that Titus was consciously planning to establish a frontier within Britain, to abandon any notion of conquering the whole island.

But Titus died and Domitian resumed advance. Resumed it, that is, until serious military problems on the Danube intervened. A legion and some auxiliary troops were withdrawn from Britain and as a result newly-won territory abandoned. The trend was reinforced under Trajan whose interests, as we have seen, lay further east and south, so that by the early years of the second century troops lay no

further north than the Tyne-Solway line, the line of the Stanegate.

### The Frontiers under Hadrian

This then is the situation that Hadrian inherited: so it came about that this was the line which was to be consolidated as the northern frontier of the province. The evidence for the development of the so-called Stanegate frontier, has fairly recently been re-examined by Brian Dobson, in his Horsley lecture (Dobson 1986), and it is inappropriate to go into any detail here, except to reiterate the point that the development of a recognizable frontier, with what was to become the usual paraphernalia of frontier control, developed piecemeal, and that some of the links in the chain, such as, for example, the watch-towers so important to a frontier line such as that on the Stanegate, appear to have been an early Hadrianic, not a Trajanic, feature. The point is important, for it emphasizes the continuity between the underlying frontier policies (in Britain) of the two emperors. What was new, of course, was Hadrian's Wall, but what the Wall represented was consolidation and not change, the acceptance of what Trajan had probably not consciously accepted, that the frontier of Britain was to remain where it was for the foreseeable future—that is to say as long as Hadrian had any say in the matter, for no emperor can ever bind his successor: he may advise him, as Augustus did Tiberius, but whether that advice was taken is another matter.

And of course it wasn't only the frontier in Britain, but all the frontiers that were to be consolidated and regulated—and this is where Hadrian differed from his predecessors inaugurating a broadly consistent Empire-wide policy. And, moreover, a policy which involved, in places, the abandonment of territory already won: the newly-conquered but as yet unsettled area of Greater Armenia was given up: so too was direct control of the Wallachian Plain and southern Moldavia, and possibly also the Banat. Control here was exercised indirectly by diplomatic means, a point to which I shall return.

While the policy is consistent, the detail of

the way in which that policy was applied on the ground, the way in which it is reflected in the archaeological evidence, varies from province to province, from region to region. The reasons are various—the results of human as well as physical geography, of demography, of politics, of geology and topography. The imperial boundaries were defined in basically four different but inter-linked ways; using artificial barriers, rivers, mountain ranges and deserts. Britain is unique in that both of its frontier lines, Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall, are formed wholly of an artificial barrier, wholly, that is, except for the river estuaries at which both of them terminated on both flanks. But Britain's frontiers are unique in one important way which had a significant influence on their form and functioning: they were extremely short relative to the area of the province they front and the size of the garrison available to man them and to operate as required beyond them. If we look around the edges of the Empire, we have:

- i. In Britain a frontier a mere 128 km long (the Antonine Wall half this), going coast to coast in a single unbroken, integrated line. It straddles a single province, with a single governor to whom all the individual unit commanders were directly responsible.
- ii. The Rhine-Danube frontier, continuous from North Sea to Black Sea, extends over more than 2000 km (1250 miles) as the crow flies: its length doubles if you follow its winding contours and embrace the land that lies beyond. Eight separate provincial governors (or eleven including the Dacias), separate and independent from one another, exercise control over that length of frontier and between them command half the legions in the entire Empire, but in total only slightly more than three times as many regular troops as were based in the one province of Britain.
- iii. The Eastern Frontier, from Black Sea to Red Sea, covers 1400 km of the most varied terrain, has half the number of troops as the Rhine-Danube line, organized into three separate commands, Cappadocia, Syria and Arabia.

iv. And finally the North African frontier, a massive 4000 km as the crow flies, coast to coast, divided into five provinces with fewer legionaries and only about the same number of auxiliary soldiers as were based in Britain.

These frontiers served a variety of functions. Above all they formed a bureaucratic divide, the interface between one people and another, the definition of Rome's territory—as Hadrian's biographer put it in relation specifically to Hadrian's Wall, “that it might divide barbarian from Roman” (*Historia Augusta, Hadrianus* 11.2). From this springs the role of the customs barrier, the point at which a check may be maintained on who is going into and out of provincial territory, at which trade may be regulated and taxes imposed on goods moving in and out of the Empire. And then there is the military role, affording protection to those who lie within its shelter, preventing or rather hindering illicit trans-border movement—in effect a policing role, for in the Roman world the army served as police. Much of the trouble encountered on the frontiers is likely to be fairly small-scale petty raiding of the sort which will go on during what is essentially peace-time. The border installations, can significantly help in the control of such problems. When it comes to full-scale war the frontier works become largely irrelevant, the presence of a river or an artificial barrier a positive hindrance to the swift deployment of Roman troops.

#### Natural Frontiers

Where conveniently available, natural geographical features were used to designate the boundaries of the Roman Empire. Clearest of all were rivers, which form good frontier lines in the bureaucratic sense, since they are very precise, obvious physical features marking out a very specific stretch of terrain. Even if they dry up or freeze over their course is still clear. Consider how often a river is used in our literary sources as a marker of ground gained within the context of military campaigning. For example in Britain, Ostorius Scapula, is said to have disarmed all the peoples this side of the Trent and Severn: Agricola's fourth campaign

took him as far as the Tay.

In the very earliest years of Caesar's campaigns in Gaul, the Rhine is being regarded as a sort of *de facto* boundary by both Roman and German sides. For example, when Caesar sought retribution against tribes from the right bank who crossed it into Gaul: "Caesar sent an embassy to the Sugambri to demand the surrender of men who had made war on him and on Gaul, they answered that the Rhine was the limit of Roman sovereignty. If Caesar held that the Germans had no right to cross into Gaul against his wishes, how could he claim any domination or authority across the Rhine." (*Bell. Gall.* 4.1)—this despite the fact that the river formed no great cultural divide. The Menapii, for example, had, according to Caesar, lands, farmhouses and villages on both banks of the river (*Bell. Gall.* 4.4) The Batavi occupied part of the left bank and an island in the middle (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.12). In his campaigns beyond the Rhine, Drusus is described as progressing in 11 B.C. as far as the Weser, which he attempted unsuccessfully to cross. In 9 B.C. he reached as far as the Elbe, again failing to go beyond (Dio 54.33.1; 55.1.2). In both cases a river is being used as a convenient stopping point, a clear designation of land covered. And in time, of course, the Rhine and the Danube, the two major European river systems, came to form the backbone of the Roman frontiers in mainland Europe (Maxfield 1987a).

But while they are bureaucratically very convenient, rivers are not easy to enforce as frontiers: they hinder movement, but they cannot stop it entirely unless they are set in steep and inaccessible gorges, as was, for example, part of the Euphrates frontier between Cappadocia and Armenia where a combination of mountain and river provided a stronger frontier line, the Euphrates gouging its way through the high and inhospitable ranges of the Kurdish Taurus and the Anti-Taurus. River frontiers such as Rhine and Danube, however, needed to be patrolled for much of their length for much of the time, for they can be crossed by wading, swimming, on temporary or permanent bridges, or, in winter, by simply walking

over on ice. Dio tells us, for example, that in 10 B.C. the Dacians crossed the Ister (viz the Danube) on the ice and carried off booty from Pannonia, while in A.D. 89 (according to Suetonius, *Domitianus* 6) "only an amazing stroke of luck checked the rebellion which Lucius Antonius (Saturninus) raised during Domitian's absence from Rome. The Rhine thawed in the nick of time, preventing the German barbarians in Saturninus' pay from crossing the ice to join him".

Finally, in a very telling comment on the problems of a river in the context of major warfare, Dio records that Trajan had his fine bridge built over the Danube "because he feared that some time when the Ister was frozen over, war might be made on the Romans on the further side, and he wished to facilitate access to them by this means." (Dio 68.13.6)

A river is, too, a means of communication—it unites as well as divides—Rhine and Danube, in Roman times as today, were major European highways, extensively used for trading purposes and therefore attracting settlement along their banks. It is hardly surprising, therefore that we find three of the provincial fleets, the *classes Germanica, Pannonica* and *Moesica* operating on those parts of the European waterway system which formed the frontier line (while the *classis Pontica* operated in a frontier region on the Black Sea).

Mountains, on the other hand, while providing less precise legal dividing lines than do rivers, make good frontiers from the point of view of control. Movement is necessarily restricted to natural passes; hence observation and control can be concentrated on these natural lines of communication rather than spread out thinly along the complete frontier line. Manpower resources can be used economically. The site of Aosta neatly illustrates the point. Terentius Varro placed his base-camp here during his conquest of the Salassi in the 20s B.C. The camp (and later colony) is strategically sited at the junction of the Great and Little St Bernard Passes, controlling access from Northern Italy northwards into what is now Switzerland, and west into the Rhone

Valley, a crucial frontier region until the conquest of the tribes of the Voralpenland beyond.

The last of the Roman provinces to be won, the Dacias, are also surrounded by a natural amphitheatre of mountains, and this was exploited by the Romans. Troops could be concentrated on the weak points, the gaps where rivers break through: the Mures in the west, facing the Iazyges of the Great Hungarian Plain: the Somes in the north-west with access to the lands of the Quadi, and the passes in the southern Carpathians which provided the tenuous road links with the Danube and the province of Moesia beyond.

The mountainous terrain on either side of the Euphrates frontier forms, as we have seen, an important element in its control, for movement in the frontier area tends to be channelled towards particular crossing points. Control could be focused on critical points on the traditional caravan routes to the East east of Satala, for example, where a caravan route from the east crosses the frontier, heading westwards to Ankara and beyond, or branching north, via the Zigana Pass through the Pontic Alps to the Black Sea port of Trapezus, Trabzon (fig. 1). At the junction in the road, sits the legionary fortress of Satala. To the south, in the saddle between Anti-Taurus and Kurdish Taurus another historic caravan route passes the Euphrates at the site of Melitene: here too a legionary fortress sits on guard.

A problem of a rather different nature are the desert frontiers which run through Syria and Arabia, and across the top of North Africa. A desert provides neither the clear dividing line of the river, nor the firmly channelled routes of the mountain pass. The desert frontiers may be defined as the point where settled agriculture fades out. Their strength lies in the sparsity of the population which lies beyond them; but that population though sparse tends to be mobile, be it traders or transhuming farmers. Mobility in desert areas is severely restricted and to an extent regulated by the provision of water sources, and the spread of the camel, which gives so much longer-range mobility has been argued as one of the factors

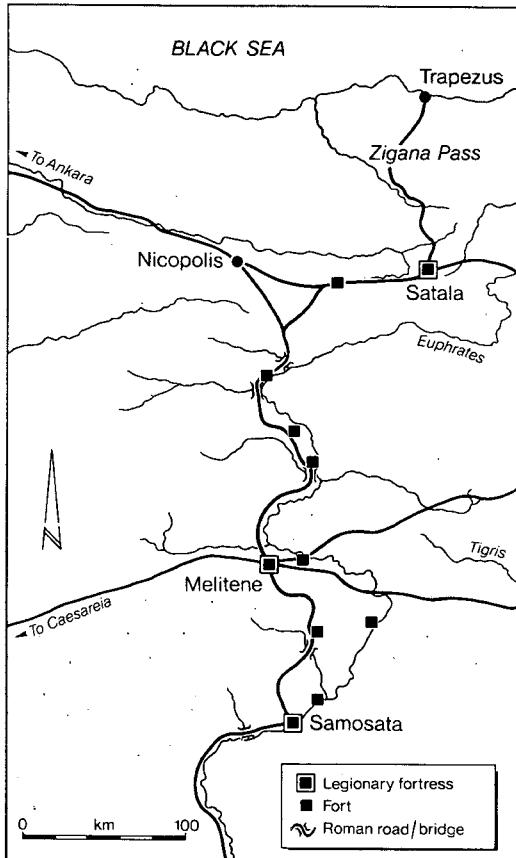


Fig. 1. *The Euphrates frontier.*

contributing to the increasing pressures on the desert frontiers in the later Roman period.

Clearly policing of the entire desert fringe would have been out of the question, a waste of resources and neither desirable nor feasible. The Roman army itself was a major water-consumer so that its bases as well as the routes of its opponents were determined in part by watering points. For example, the roads which led from the Red Sea ports to the Nile, passing through the lands of the Blemmyes and Trogodites, were studded with fortified watering places or *hydreumata*, and small forts with fortified animal lines, which fulfilled the dual role of protection and supervision. In Arabia, a fort at Azraq oasis guarded the head of the route up the Wadi Sirhan. In Tripolitania

outpost forts were stationed at oases on the three major caravan routes from the interior, at Ghadames, Gheriat el-Garbia and Bu Ngem.

### Artificial Frontiers

Finally, where no suitable and adequate natural features existed, there are artificial barriers. Looked at in relation to the total length of frontier line, the artificial barriers are the exception not the rule, and it is only in Britain that they form the entire length of the frontiers across both Tyne-Solway and Forth-Clyde isthmuses. Even in Upper Germany and Raetia where there are considerable lengths of artificial barrier, these alternate with lengths of riverine frontier.

The introduction of man-made obstacles to facilitate frontier control is a practice associated (in the Roman world) particularly with Hadrian, who used them methodically, integrated in a planned fashion with river, mountain and desert. While this consistent use of the linear barrier in a frontier context is something new, it is of course, merely a fresh application of a well-tried means of controlling and channelling population movement by the use of linear obstacles, be they banks, ditches, walls or fences. Substantial earth-moving tasks were common-place activities for the Roman soldier, for whom ditch-digging and rampart-construction were part of the regular round of camp-building or the less frequent but more massive undertaking of siege engineering. Caesar quotes an interesting example of an isolated tactical use of a linear boundary to control population movement at the start of the Gallic War when, in 58 B.C., a rampart 16 feet high, with parallel ditch and accompanying *castella*, was built over a distance of 18 miles in order to prevent the migration of the Helvetii westwards, through the only easy pass out of their country, in the area of Geneva, towards the Roman province (Caesar, *Bell. Gall.* 1.8).

A question which is often posed in relation to Hadrian's Wall, is why the western third was initially built of turf rather than of stone. Looked at in the context of the whole Roman military tradition of field engineering and fron-

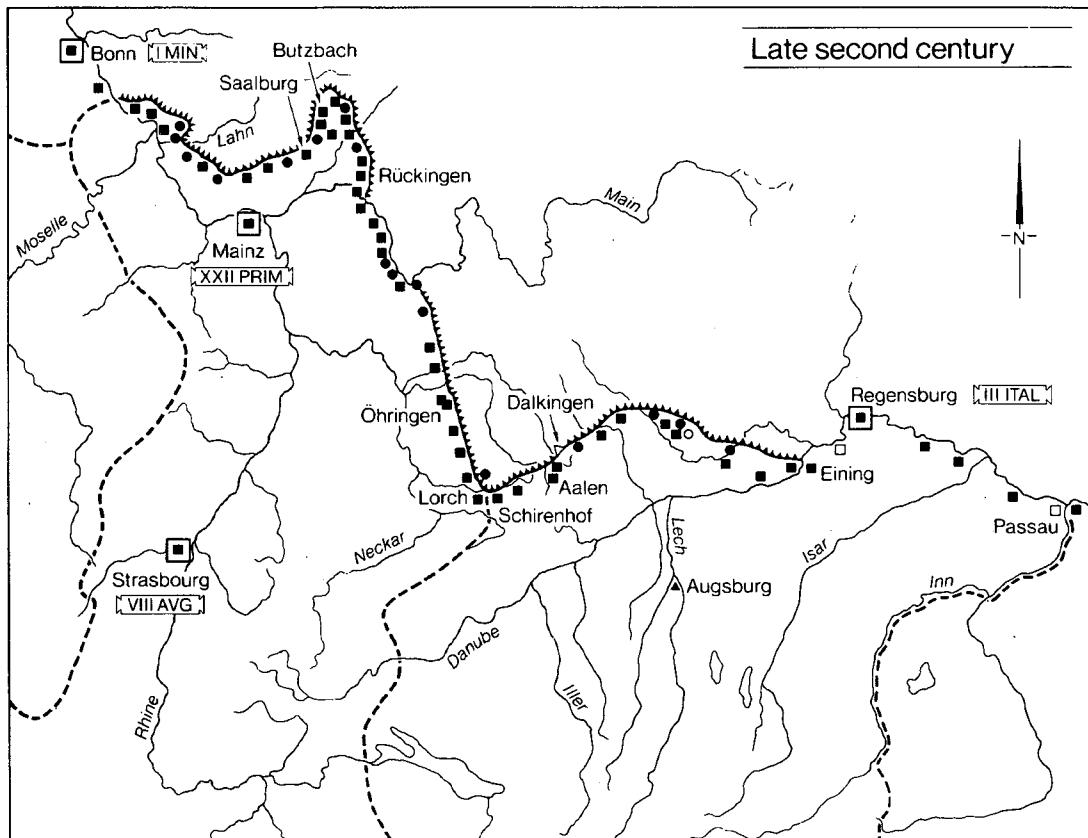
tier construction, the question should perhaps be turned on its head: why was the eastern two-thirds built of cut and mortared stone and on so massive a scale? Only the Raetian Wall, constructed in the late second or early third century to replace a timber palisade is of comparable construction, but even it is only half the width, and probably stood appreciably less high.

Britain's second (and later) linear barrier, the Antonine Wall, was built mainly of turf (though earth or clay were sometimes substituted) on a cobblestone base. It averaged about 4.5 m wide, and stood an estimated 3 m high, above which there probably rose a timber parapet. It was fronted by a ditch which varies in width from between a minimum of 4.3 m and a maximum of 20.7. The cobbled base apart, the only stone used anywhere in its construction was in the forts which lie at approximately 2-mile intervals along its line. Two of these have stone ramparts, as well as part-stone internal buildings. The majority of the forts are, however, of turf and timber, with just their major buildings constructed in stone (at foundation level if not in their superstructure). The fortlets on the Antonine Wall are built purely in turf and timber, and so too the "expansions" and minor enclosures associated with the barrier (Hanson and Maxwell 1983, Chapter V).

Even less substantial in its construction was the German-Raetian frontier. Here the artificial barrier constructed by Hadrian took the form, for far the greater part of its length, of a wooden palisade. Nothing survives of the superstructure of this barrier, but the evidence from below ground is of a substantial fence constructed of large oak timbers, roughly 30 cm in diameter, set side by side in a trench sunk a metre or so into the ground. In places the timber uprights were wedged in position with stones. Surviving nails probably relate to some form of cross-bracing.

In all probability it is this frontier to which Hadrian's biographer is alluding when he notes that:

"... in many regions where the barbarians are held back not by rivers but by artificial barriers,



- ↗ Provincial boundary (approximate)
- ✚ Rampart, ditch and palisade (Upper Germany)
- ✚ Stone wall (Raetia)
- Legionary fortress
- Fort
- Fort (presumed)
- Small fort
- Small fort (presumed)



Fig. 2. *The Upper German-Raetian frontier.*

Hadrian shut them off by means of high stakes planted deep in the ground and fastened together in the manner of a palisade." (HA *Hadrianus* 12.6)

Here an artificial frontier is being juxtaposed with a natural barrier, a river, precisely what

we see on the German-Raetian *limes*. The way in which the artificial barrier is used is particularly instructive, for it is distinctly intermittent, appearing only where no river line existed. From the Rhine mouth to Rheinbrohl, the river forms the frontier in an unbroken line. The frontier then swings out to embrace the

territory brought into the Empire during Domitian's War against the Chatti. It takes off across country, bulging out around the area of the Neuwied basin, an area rich in mineral resources, cuts across the river Lahn (not running along it), to pick up the curve of the Taunus Mountains, which it then follows. The line then bends southwards to head across country, embracing the fertile Wetterau, towards the river Main. From Rhine to Main the frontier is formed by the palisade. On the Main the palisade stops and the river defines the frontier until it starts to curve away to the east at Wörth. The palisade resumes in a cross-country stretch, heading for the middle Neckar, the so-called Odenwald *limes*. On the Neckar the palisade stops, the river once again forming the frontier line. And so it goes on through the adjacent province of Raetia where the frontier line has to cope with the Rhine-

Danube salient. A palisade was constructed across the Swabian Alps until the point where the Danube is reached just downstream from the fort of Eining. From here eastwards to the Danube mouth (excluding only the Dacian salient), the river constitutes the frontier line.

Exactly the same thing is repeated when, during the reign of Antoninus Pius, the Odenwald-Neckar line was abandoned in favour of a more advanced frontier line, the outer *limes* (fig. 2). Having left behind the Neckar in favour of a line with no convenient south-north flowing river, the palisade now forms a virtually continuous frontier line from Main to Danube.

In the later second or early third century the palisade was probably in a state of decay. It was replaced or supplemented in Germany by an earthwork, a bank and ditch constructed behind the palisade line (fig. 3), and in Raetia

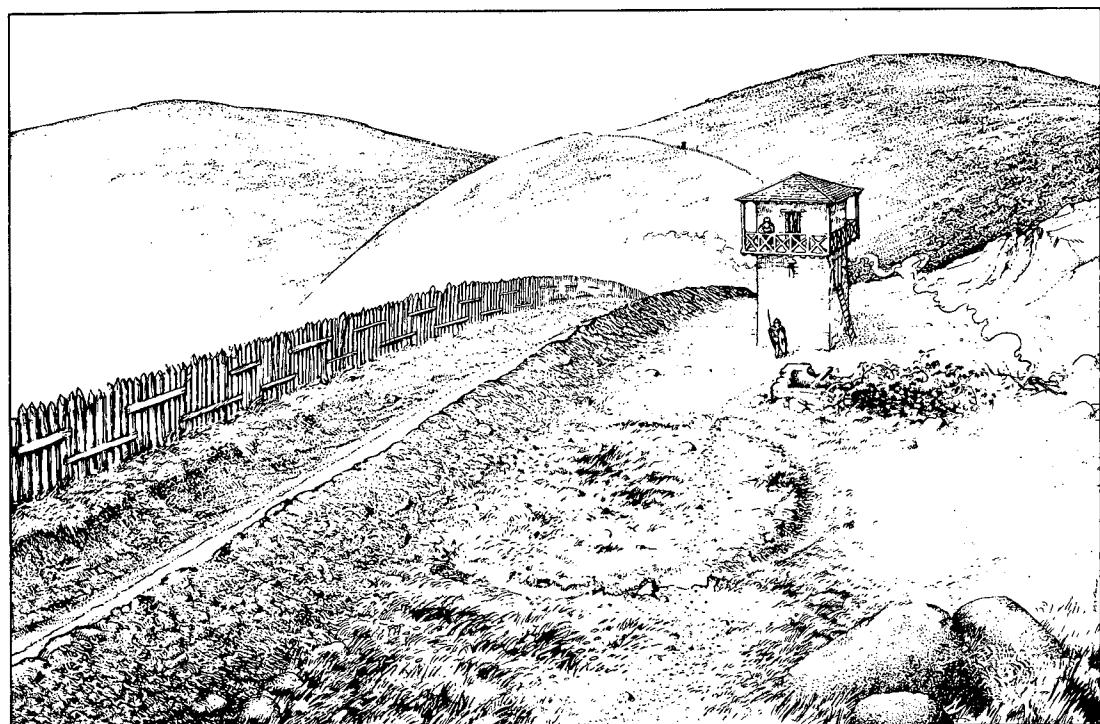


Fig. 3. The Upper German frontier in the third century.

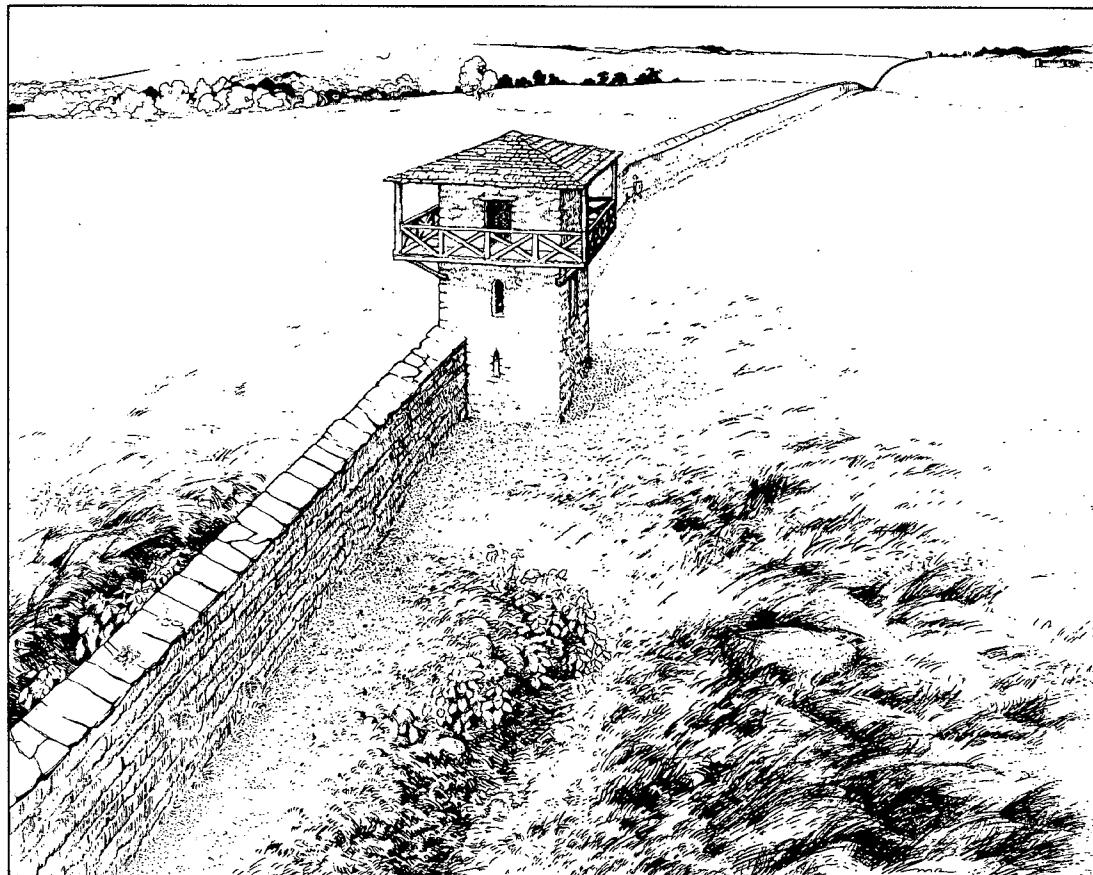


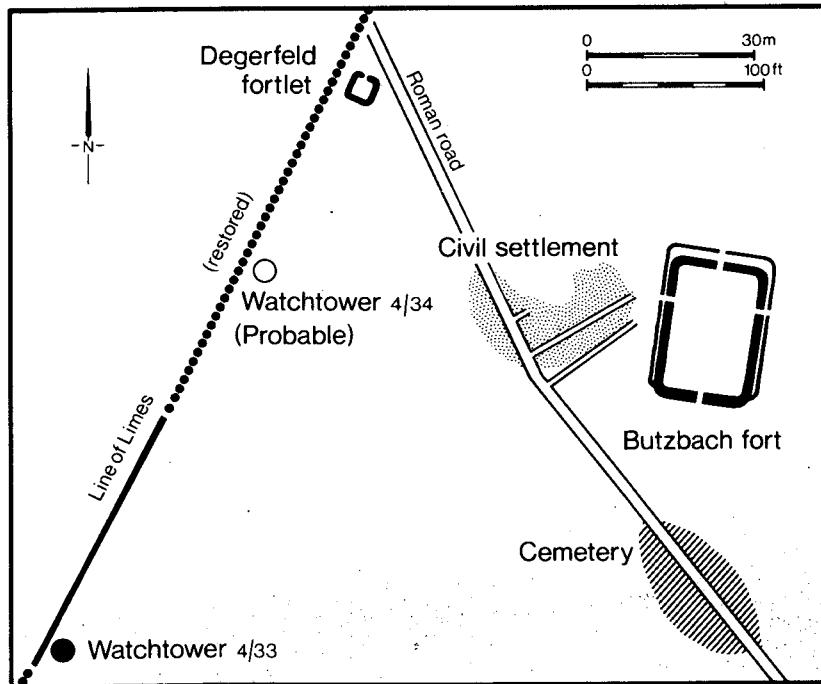
Fig. 4. *The Raetian frontier in the third century.*

by a stone wall, known as the *Teufelsmauer*, the Devil's Wall—but a stone wall of a considerably slighter nature than Hadrian's Wall (fig. 4). It was only 4 Roman feet (1·2 m) wide, constructed of roughly coursed masonry on a shallow foundation. Reconstructions of this wall commonly assume it to have a sloping top, to throw off water. A flat top would have collected water which would in time have percolated down into the wall structure and caused it to crack apart. The top was, in any case, too narrow for there to be any question of its having supported a wall-walk.

In Germany and in Raetia (as in Britain on Hadrian's Wall) there are localized variations

in the materials used in construction. For example, a narrow stone wall substitutes for the palisade in a section of the Odenwald *limes*, while a drystone wall takes the place of the earthen bank and ditch for a stretch of the Taunus area. Palisades substitute for its line in a swampy area in the eastern Wetterau.

The regularity and logicality of the river/palisade alternation in Germany and Raetia highlight the problem of the interpretation of the Cumbrian Coastal ditches on the west flank of Hadrian's Wall (Jones 1976). The Wall itself stops, logically, at Bowness where the Solway estuary starts, an estuary which serves admirably the dual purposes of bureaucratically de-



*Fig. 5. The Upper German frontier in the area of Butzbach.*

fining the frontier line and at the same time hindering movement, in the same way that Rhine, Main, Neckar and Danube did. The role of the two slight obstacles which follow the frontier line around the coast in this sector, remains (to the present writer at least) enigmatic.

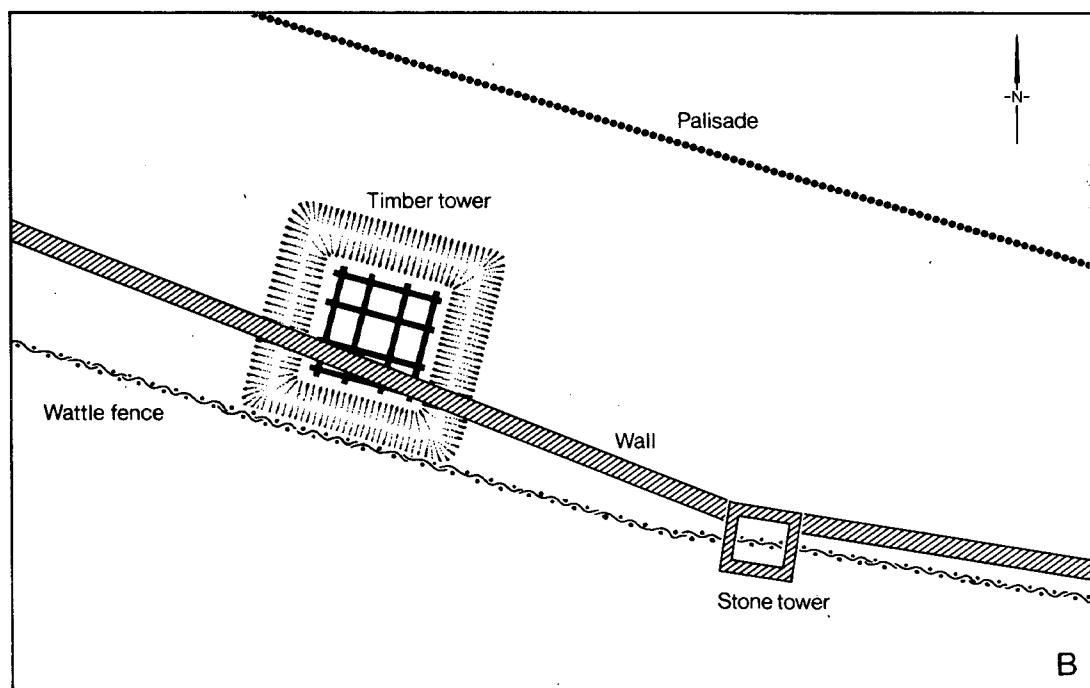
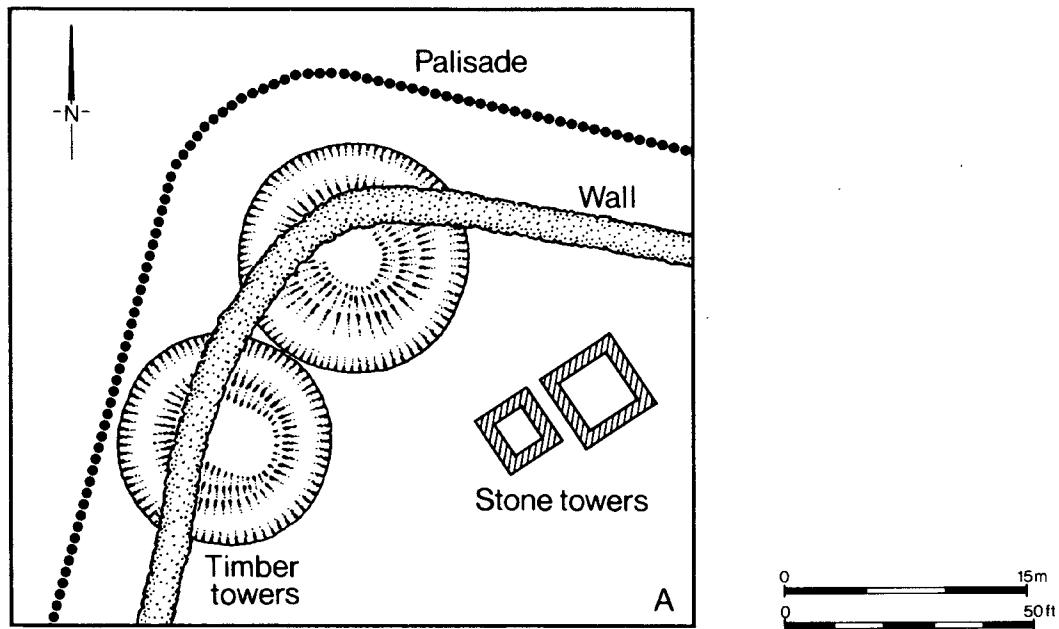
The relationship of river and artificial barrier—whether palisade, rampart or narrow wall—indicates very clearly that the two are designed to perform the self-same task. The nature of this task was presumably to define the frontier line (the legal bureaucratic role), to provide a control on movement across its line, channelling legitimate movement towards approved crossing points, while hindering small-scale illicit movement.

Provision was made for controlled crossings through the artificial barrier. Original crossings are of course much more difficult to identify in a palisade or earthwork than in a wall, but they

appear often to have been overseen by a fortlet (the mile-castle equivalent) or a watchtower (the turret equivalent). Forts were commonly positioned on major routes, not so much for strictly frontier duties (narrowly construed), but because these routes gave access to the lands beyond. At Butzbach, for example, in the eastern Taunus, a fortlet, Degerfeld, sits right up on the line of the palisade, guarding the crossing proper; the fort lies slightly back from it (fig. 5).

The fortlets and towers of the frontier guard appear at regular but not set intervals behind the frontier line. The towers are placed as close as 120 m or as distant as 700 m, their positioning determined by topography rather than a regular pre-determined pattern. And here it is

*Fig. 6. A. Upper German frontier at tower 3/61: B. Raetian frontier at tower 14/17 (after ORL).*



important to note that the towers, some of the fortlets and a few of the forts were in existence well before the construction of the palisade. For here Hadrian inherited the frontier line established by Domitian and maintained by Trajan. Already under Domitian a controlled albeit open frontier was being constructed—a frontier road, a cleared strip so that movement across the frontier line could be observed, watch-towers from which to conduct the observation and fortlets as bases for the frontier-watch. It is a close and almost contemporary parallel to the Gask Frontier in Britain.

These early frontier works were built in earth and timber. They were replaced in stone on the same or immediately adjacent sites as and when they decayed. Hadrian's frontier palisade snakes around the existing installations (fig. 6A). There can thus be none of the close physical integration of the independent elements—linear barrier, watchtowers, and controlled gateways—that we see on Hadrian's Wall. In Britain Hadrian worked with a clean sheet: he began anew and could devise a structural whole (though in practice, as we know, changes were introduced within a very short time of the start of building work). Also the materials used are suited to building an integrated whole in the way that a palisade can never have been. It is noticeable that in Raetia the timber then stone towers lay behind the palisade line. When this was replaced in stone the narrow wall taking a line behind the palisade line, butts up to the towers (fig. 6B).

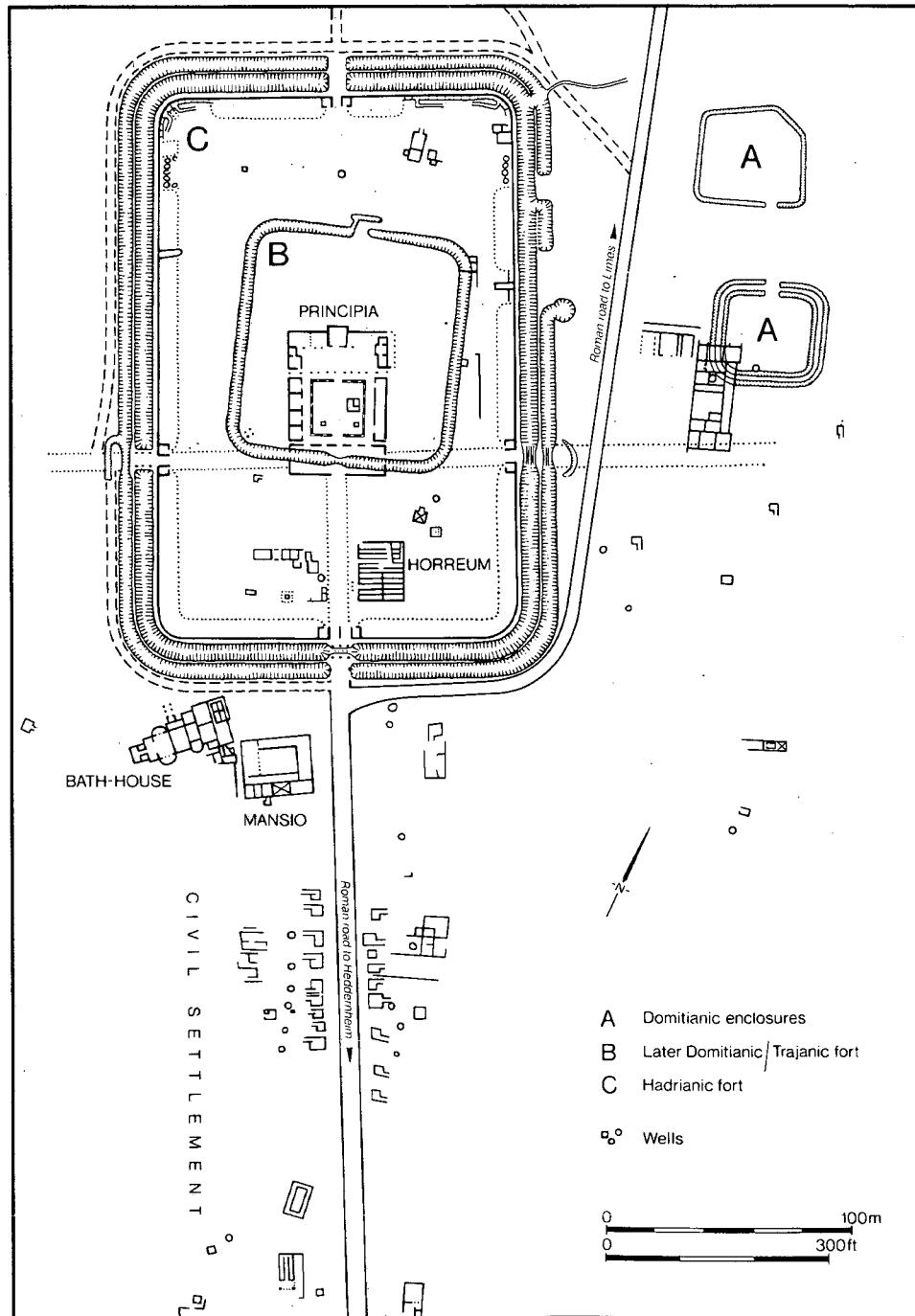
Hadrian did in Upper Germany and Raetia precisely what he did in Britain: he sought to facilitate frontier control by putting in a running barrier where no physical obstacle existed. Here too he brought forts up onto the line of the frontier—some were there already but he supplemented them, adjusting the military dispositions. At the Saalburg, for example, he put in a cohort where there had previously been a smaller (probably irregular) unit, and before that, an even smaller detachment (fig. 7). The Saalburg illustrates well the gradual thickening up of control on the frontier line itself. The area behind the frontier was now demilitarized: the forts at Wiesbaden and

Frankfurt disappear, and the land handed over to the civilian authorities: the *civitas Mattiacorum* and the *civitas Taunensium*.

It is clear that certain of the questions which preoccupy students of Hadrian's Wall are totally irrelevant here: there can be no debate over whether or not the top of the palisade was patrolled, or indeed whether anyone ever fought from its top! This linear frontier was clearly intended to function without a patrol along its top. That does not prove that Hadrian's Wall was not patrolled, but does indicate that the Romans were perfectly happy to function with a frontier barrier which could not be patrolled at the level of its top. Towers were provided from which observation—laterally, to front and to rear—could be maintained far better than from the lower level of the barrier itself. We do not know the height of the German-Raetian palisade: some 3 or 4 metres might be a reasonable estimate, lower than the estimated 5 metres of Hadrian's Wall, but even this is considerably lower than the 10 metres or so which would be a reasonable height for a watch-tower.

Geographically, the next artificial boundaries we encounter are in Dacia, where they are integrated, as in Germany-Raetia with natural features, in this case mountains. The heartland of Dacia was surrounded by an amphitheatre of mountains, the Carpathians to the east, the Transylvanian Alps to the south, and curving down towards the Danube at Orsova, and in the west the mountains of Bihar. Three areas are exposed, with no natural definition or defence, and in two of these traces of an artificial barrier have been noted. In the north-west there is a gap in the mountain cover, where the rivers Cris and Somes flow through. It is today the major northern route of approach to Romania from Hungary, across the Great Hungarian Plain. Beyond this gap were the mobile and spasmodically hostile Sarmatian Iazyges, and control of movement through into the province was facilitated by the use of lengths of artificial barrier—the *limes*

Fig. 7. *Saalburg fort.*



*Porolissensis*—cutting across the gap in advance of the major military complex at Porolissum where two forts co-existed side by side. The linear works used here are largely earth work, partly narrow stone wall, relatively insubstantial in construction but sufficient to impede the free movement of Sarmatian horsemen, and channel legitimate trade towards controlled crossing points (fig. 8). The linear barriers form part of a frontier line, with watch-towers and fortlets, running in advance of a line of forts. Some of the fortlets such as those at Brebi, north-east of Porolissum, are structurally integrated with the line of the earthwork, with which they are apparently contemporary. A Hadrianic foundation date for the complex is assumed, though few of the elements have been tested by excavation.

In the south-east of the province, Dacia Inferior stretches into the western part of the Wallachian Plain. It fronts the eastern part of

the plain and southern Moldavia, which had been incorporated by Trajan into Roman territory—he had attached it to the province of lower Moesia—but Hadrian abandoned it, evacuated the Roman troops and handed it back to the Roxolani, another Sarmatian tribe. The frontier between Roman and native traversed the Wallachian plain across which two south-north roads linked the Danube with Dacia north of the Alps—the western road running up the valley of the Olt, the *limes Alutanus*, to the Red Tower Pass, the other, some 20–30 km to the east, heading for the Bran Pass, the so-called *limes Transalutanus*. Just in advance of this road, on its eastern flank, was constructed an earthwork, an unditched timber revetted earthen bank. Its date is a matter of dispute. Evidence on the ground is inconclusive. Commonly attributed to Antoninus Pius, a good case has recently been made for a Hadrianic context (Bogdan-Cataniciu

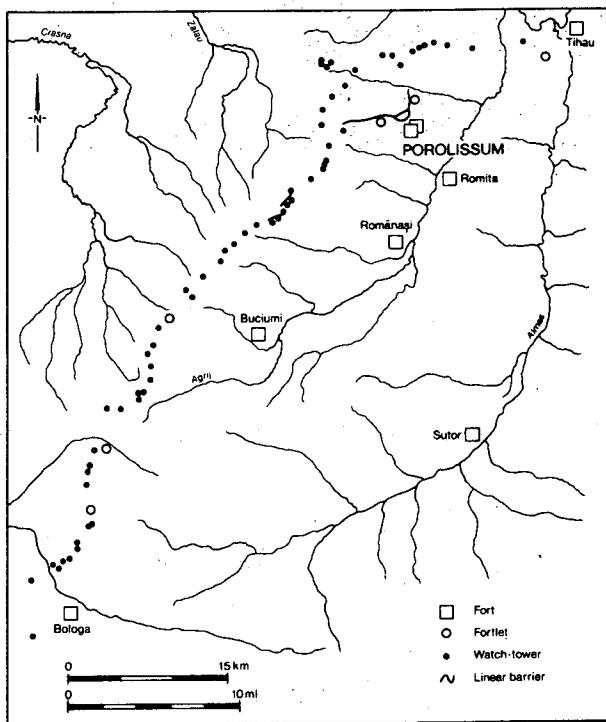


Fig. 8. *The Limes Porolissensis.*

1981). It makes sense—an otherwise totally open frontier which served also as one of the lifelines by which Dacia was rather tenuously attached to the Danubian provinces, facing an area occupied by a highly mobile population, under treaty relations with Rome, but of very uncertain allegiance. Again the barrier is slight, but sufficient to define and to deter.

A final example of Hadrianic use of an artificial frontier line, lies in North Africa, in Numidia, the frontier area of Africa Proconsularis. Here we are faced with an area with a very different set of problems from those encountered in the temperate north-western provinces. The desert frontiers face a zone where population is sparse, but—a problem from the point of view of frontier control—mobile. The desert provinces peter out at the point beyond which settled agriculture becomes impossible,

even with the water-conservative farming methods characteristic of areas of sparse rainfall. For much of their length the desert frontiers face onto impassable, waterless, trackless wastes: areas where frontier policing is unnecessary. However in places old-established trade routes from the interior approached the frontiers, while another factor of major importance in population movement in these frontier areas was that of seasonal transhumance, the movement of flocks from their winter grazing grounds in the desert fringes, to the lusher summer vegetation of the pre-desert and steppe regions of the provincial area. The relation between these nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes and the settled populations of the interior, was a symbiotic one: the nomadic pastoralists needed the summer grazing and markets for their animals. The settled farmers needed

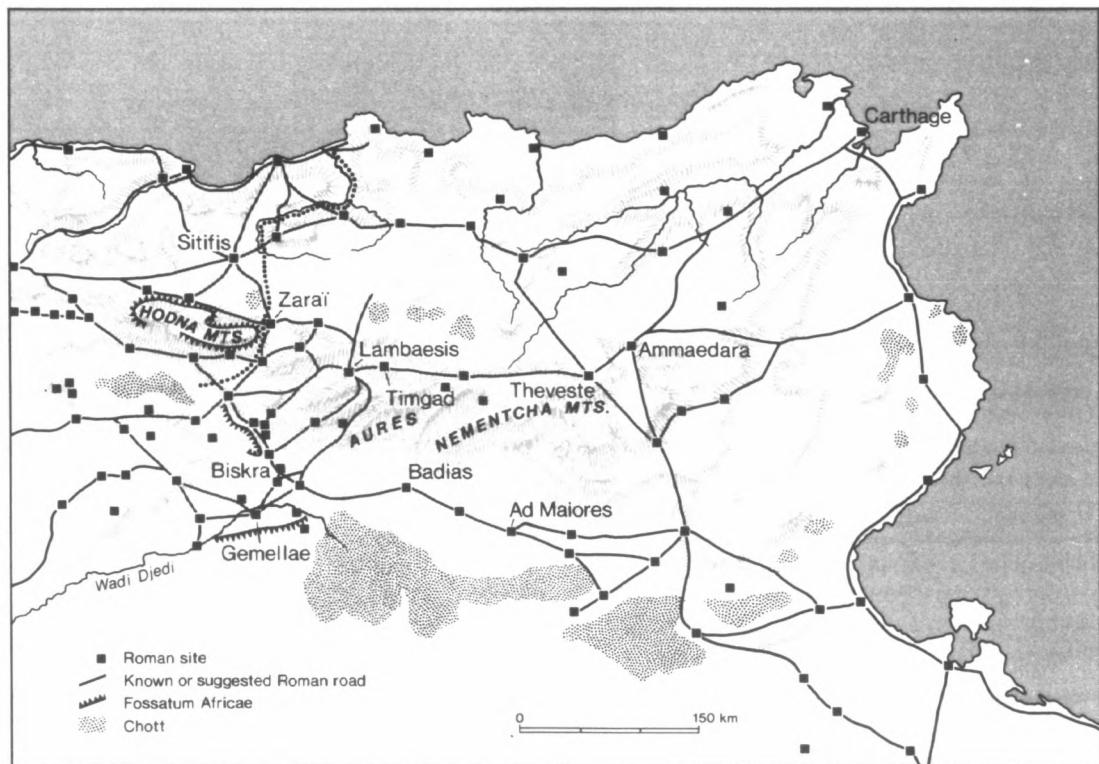


Fig. 9. The frontier in Africa.

hired hands, animals to manure their newly cut fields and a market for their grain. It was therefore in nobody's interest to curtail this traditional way of life. Rather it needed to be kept under control. The frontiers which developed to accommodate it have been neatly described by Charles Daniels in a recent survey of the frontiers in North Africa as "a porous and even discontinuous membrane, designed to allow . . . movement to continue, but in a more orderly, regulated fashion." (Daniels 1987, 235)

In Africa, Hadrian inherited a situation in which direct control had been extended, probably by Trajan, to the desert edge south of the Aurès and the Nementchas, eastern outliers of the Saharan Atlas (fig. 9). The one African legion, *III Augusta*, had been moved, again probably by Trajan, westwards from Theveste to Lambaesis. Part of the legion was building there already under Domitian and the whole unit was certainly there under Hadrian. The presence of a Trajanic colony at Timgad, in advance of Theveste but east of Lambaesis, is consistent with a Trajanic date for the main move to Lambaesis. A Trajanic fort lies at Ad Majores on an east-west road south of the Nemenchas and the Aurès, which was probably extended at this time to Badias and probably as far as Biskra, where routes penetrated the province, in the direction of Lambaesis, from the south-west.

To this loose open frontier, Hadrian added linear barriers, known under the collective title of the *Fossatum Africae*. Colonel Baradez, who, forty years ago, published what is still the fundamental study of this monument (Baradez 1949), identified four stretches of linear barrier, two on the west flank of the province, one facing the south and one to the south-east on the approaches to Tripolitania: the identification of this last as a frontier ditch has recently been challenged by Pol Troussel, who believes it to be a road (Troussel 1980). Baradez's work was based on a high level aerial survey which he subsequently began to follow up with ground work and selective excavation. It is clear just from a perusal of Baradez's photographs that the *Fossatum* is complex and multi-

phase. We know from written evidence—an entry of A.D. 409 in the Theodosian Code (*Cod. Theod.* VII. 15.1), which provides us with the name by which the complex is known—that it was still being kept in working order in the early years of the 5th century, so there is much to disentangle on the ground. Follow-up field work is a slow and difficult job over such a large area in very difficult conditions; work has proceeded and continues to proceed, sporadically.

The sector which has been most fully investigated is that which lies on the south-west flank of the province, the so-called "Seguia Bent el Crass". Here a 60-km stretch of barrier runs in advance of the fort of Gemellae. The fort itself, a Hadrianic creation, lies on the banks of the Wadi Djedi; the frontier work runs to the south of it, incorporating within the area it protects, within the provincial territory, the area of seasonal agriculture fed by the flood-waters of the Wadi. It regulates, but does not exclude, the northwards movements by the mobile herdsmen to the south. It was from excavation in the Gemellae sector that Baradez obtained the dating evidence which led him to propose a Hadrianic date for the *Fossatum* which had previously been thought to be a fourth-century creation.

Further to the north lies the Mesarelta Sector. This 45-km stretch cuts across the grain of the country, which runs in a generally west-south-west east-north-east direction, crossing broken mountain spurs whence access could be gained to the interior.

And finally, in the west of the province, the Hodna Mountains are all but encircled by a third length of *fossatum*, some 140 km long: its disposition is odd but is again presumably linked with the control of population movement towards Sitifis in the north, and Zarai in the east. Zarai, note, is the findspot of one of our few specific pieces of evidence about taxation on goods being brought across the border—the Tariff of Zarai (*CIL VIII* 4508).

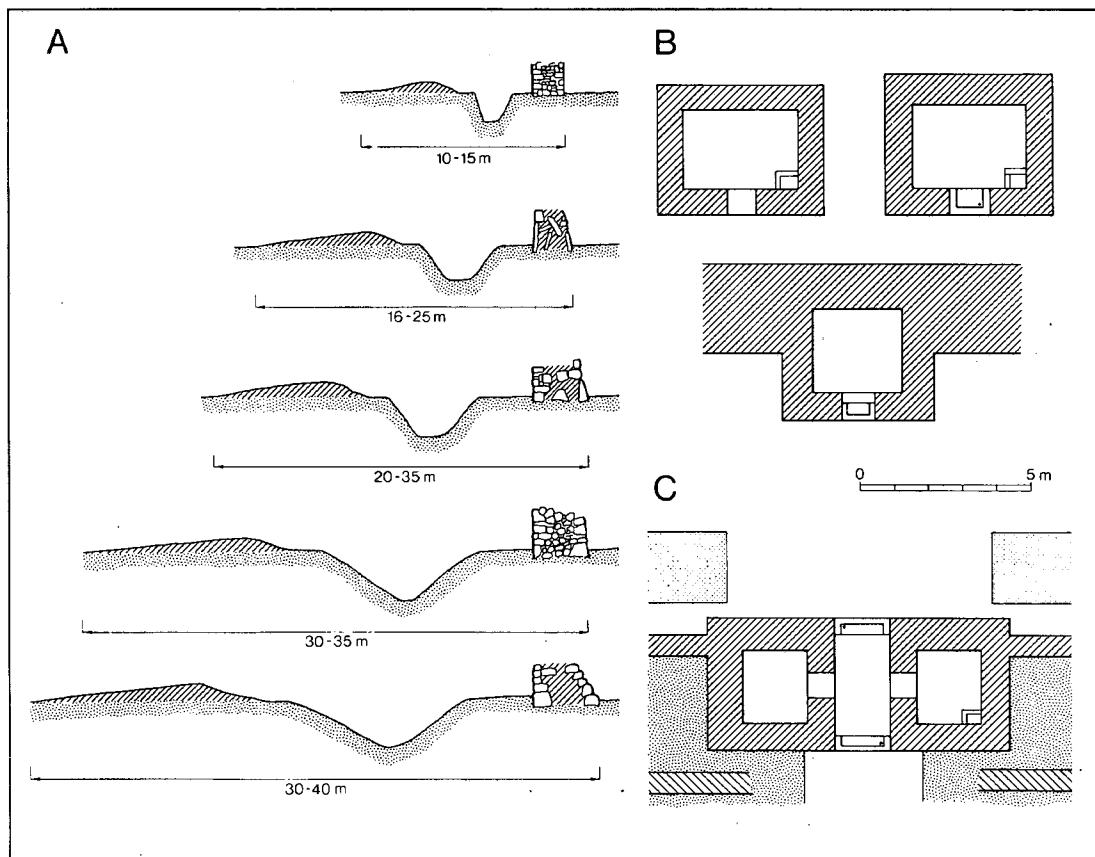
*Fig. 10. The Fossatum Africae: A. typical profiles; B. towers; C. gate in Gemellae area (after Baradez).*

The physical nature of these barriers reflects the environment in which they were built. Ditches of varying profile, depending on the material through which they were cut; walls made of broken free-stone, water-rolled boulders, occasionally cut stone, and in places where there was sufficient water available, of mud-brick (fig. 10A).

The running barriers are associated in the normal way with watch-towers, a proliferation of which are sited in advance of the barrier, to its rear making the most of the broken ground, as well as on the line of the frontier itself. Some of these are no doubt part of the original Hadrianic build, others are probably of later date. Here the *Fossatum Africae* provides one of the closest parallels to the physical integra-

tion of towers and walls familiar on Hadrian's Wall (fig. 10B). Indeed in the Gemellae sector Baradez noted what he thought to be a regular spacing of gates and towers, not at one-third mile intervals, but at half-miles, a gate alternating with a tower, the towers physically attached to the wall in a manner strongly reminiscent of Hadrian's Wall turrets. The form of the gate, parallels that of the (much later) Knag Burn gateway on Hadrian's Wall, a single passage flanked by guard-chambers, with gates both front and back (fig. 10C). The Fossatum gates are not associated with milecastles or their equivalents.

Yet again it is clear from the gateway provision that we are not talking of a preclusive frontier.



### The Disposition of Troops

All the paraphernalia of frontier control is only as effective as the army that mans it. Official crossing points would have to be permanently manned: a permanent watch would have to be kept over the frontier strip itself, and patrols maintained to front and rear to watch out for and take the necessary action to prevent illicit crossings. All this is very manpower intensive, particularly when we are thinking of frontier lines such as those in mainland Europe, a couple of thousand kilometres in length and potentially crossable for much of this stretch.

The need to take on the duties of a frontier patrol as well as (or instead of) those of a campaigning army, naturally leads to some significant changes in the dispositions of the troops. A mobile field-army keeps together in strong battle-groups: it does not greatly frag-

ment even in its winter bases—witness the large two-legion fortresses characteristic of the Augustan period in Germany. Once it becomes static it settles into smaller bases, both for ease of policing and for convenience of provisioning. Given frontier duties the army fragments even further. From its base-camps, the men are outposted to fortlets and watch-towers. The base-camps themselves tend to become disposed in close-spaced linear fashion along the frontiers.

A comparison of troop dispositions on the Danube in the early and late first century illustrates this tendency (figs. 11 and 12). Large troop concentrations give way to a linear pattern. Initially units are placed in forward positions only at major river crossings and highways into and out of the province; at Aquincum (Budapest), for example, where a major

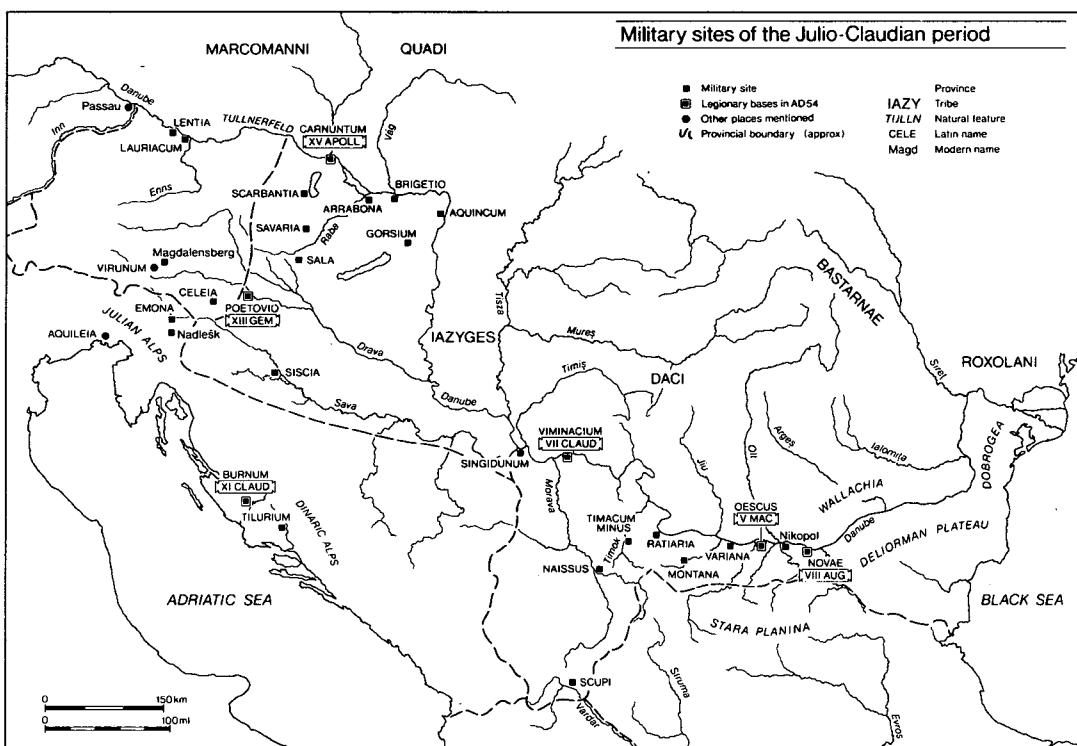


Fig. 11. *The Danube frontier in the early first century.*

diagonal route across Pannonia meets the river at the western end of the northerly route across the Great Hungarian Plain, at Brigetio on the route up the Vág valley into the territory of the Quadi, and at Carnuntum, where the Amber route from the Baltic crosses the Danube on its way south to the Julian Alps and thence into Italy. Under Domitian trouble with the tribes north of the Danube brought extra troops (both legionary and auxiliary) into the Danubian provinces and these came to be disposed along the river front, a trend which continued under Trajan when lower Moesia was reinforced in the wake of the Sarmatian invasions at the time of the Dacian wars. By the middle years of the second century forts lay disposed at about 10 km distances apart along that stretch of the river which fronted the Great Hungarian Plain and the irrepressible, trouble-

some Iazyges beyond. They are even closer in that stretch of the upper Danube which fronts the fertile and thickly populated Tullnerfeld and the lands of the hostile Marcomanni. The bulk of the Danubian lands were demilitarized, bringing about the situation which Aristides thought so praiseworthy.

The trend was similar in the Rhinelands. By the time of Hadrian only the occasional fort remained in the rear of the frontier line.

In Britain, a similar trend towards a thin linear disposition on the frontier line itself may be observed, the relatively few well-spaced large forts of the Trajanic Stanegate giving way to the smaller close-spaced Hadrianic bases with fortlets at 1-mile intervals in between: the 2-mile spacing of the even smaller Antonine wall forts accentuates the trend even further. However, in Britain, in the case of both Tyne-

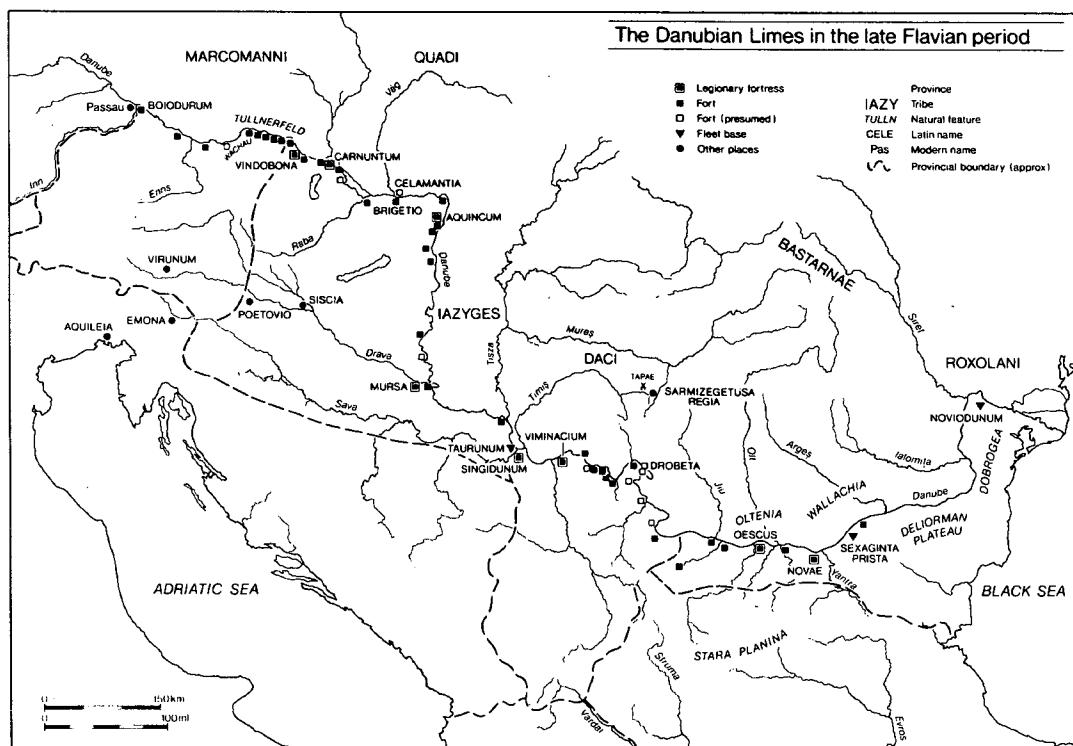


Fig. 12. *The Danube frontier in the late first century.*

Solway and Forth-Clyde frontiers there is a very significant divergence from the pattern observed on Rhine and Danube: the presence of a network of forts in the hinterland of the two frontier lines. And this, of course is one of the advantages of the unusual geographical situation of Britain's frontiers: their extreme shortness in comparison with both the size of the province they guarded and the size of the army allocated to that province. In the Hadrianic period the strength of the regular army in Britain was in the region of 50,000 men (15,000 legionaries, 35,000 auxiliaries): its frontier length 120 km. The Rhine-Danube provinces together held an army of some 170,000 regular soldiers (70,000 legionaries, 100,000 auxiliaries), but their frontiers extended over a length in excess of 3000 km, and it is hardly surprising, therefore, to find almost the entire army strung out on the front line itself.

In Britain the three legionary bases remained at all times well back from the frontier: the nearest was at York, some 120 km away: the furthest 400 km in the rear at Caerleon in South Wales, easier to provision, perhaps, closer to the provincial capital, closer to the "Romanized" heart of the province, but far from the action. And indeed we know that these bases must have stood seriously depleted for years at a time when the legionaries were busy operating in the north, campaigning under Agricola, building Hadrian's Wall, building the Antonine Wall. This contrasts with the situation in the Rhine-Danube provinces where, by the time of Domitian, all of the legions in the area—and there are twelve by this time—are based in a forward position on the rivers, their siting clearly heavily influenced by the importance of these main arterial waterways in terms of access, communication and provisioning. These legionary bases, some of which lay side by side with provincial capitals—Carnuntum, for example, capital of Pannonia Superior, raised to colonial status in the early 3rd century—attracted considerable, extensive civilian development. Markets developed here, exerting a pull on people from beyond the frontier. Major, sophisticated pro-

vincial cities—the colony of Cologne is a classic case—were developing not in the shelter of the frontier but on the very frontier line itself. The attractions of Rome were being vaunted on the very frontier lines, the thin red line which once breached, allowed the enemy into the heart of the Roman world. The bureaucratic needs of frontier control which required a widespread small-scale presence, have taken priority over the strictly military needs of the province which would have been better preserved by a less fragmented army. In the long term, of course, this was to lead to the creation, or recreation, of a mobile army, the field armies of the late Empire, existing separate from the static frontier troops (Tomlin 1987).

Britain's frontiers never acquired quite such civilian sophistication. Apart from the fort *vici* there was Corbridge and then there was Carlisle, probably elevated to the status of *civitas* in the 3rd century. The presence of the forts and their territories deep behind the Wall, must have inhibited Romanization. It also meant that there was a buffer between the frontier and the major provincial cities.

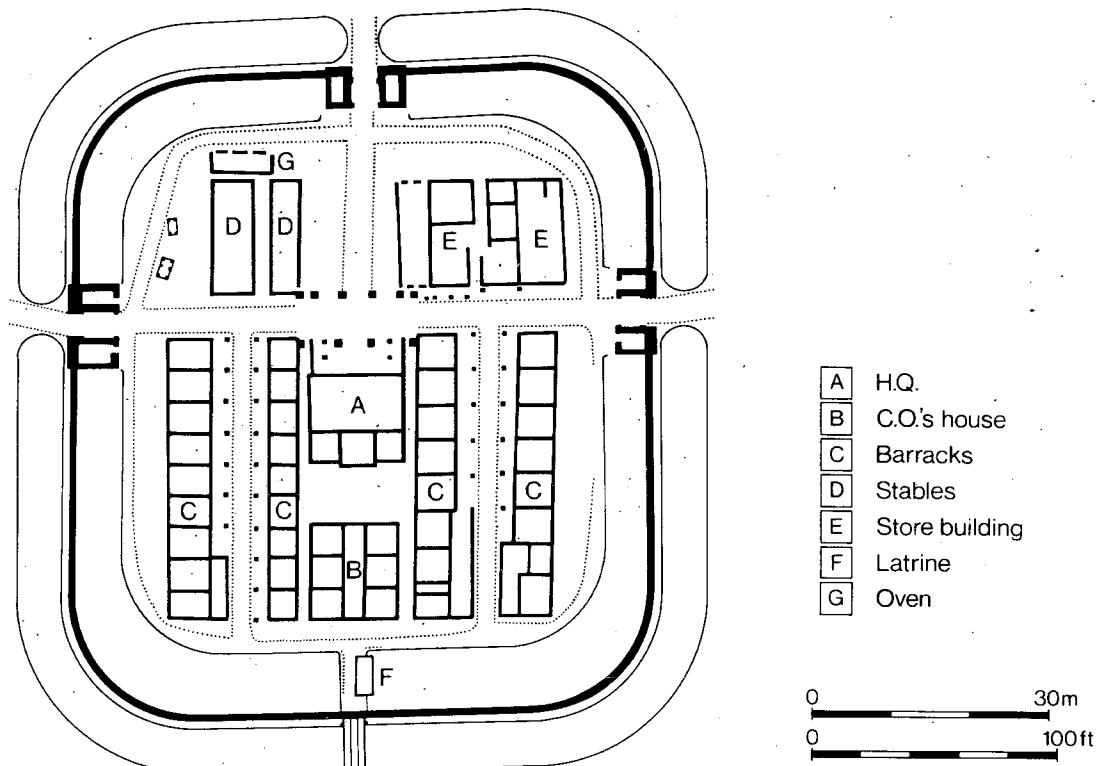
The size of Britain's auxiliary army was more than adequate for the task of patrolling its frontiers, and it is generally assumed that, initially at least, it bore the brunt of the task. This was certainly not so on Rhine and Danube, and it was perhaps for this reason that irregular units, *numeri*, were extensively employed in the task. The 65-km long Odenwald *limes* was almost exclusively manned by *numeri*. Only Neckarburken in the south had an auxiliary presence, and here two forts lay side by side, the west fort of 2.2 ha occupied by a cohort, the east fort, 0.6 ha in area, housing a *numerus*. The sparse population in advance of the frontier line here has been adduced as the reason why they alone were entrusted with this whole frontier sector. *Numeri* share the task with the auxiliaries in the Taunus-Wetterau sector, not quite alternating with one another. These *numeri* were housed in distinctive small forts (*numeruskastelle*), smaller than the auxili-

*Fig. 13. Hesselbach Numeruskastel.*

ary fort; distinct from and larger than the fortlet and having a recognizable headquarters building, which the fortlet, base for a detachment and not the headquarters staff, did not need (fig. 13).

Long ago Eric Birley suggested that *numeri* were used from the start as the patrolling garrison on Hadrian's Wall. A major plank in his argument was his disbelief in the then current view that "assumes a permanent system of splitting up regiments into small detachments, such as could not but seriously impair military efficiency even if it lasted for a comparatively short time." (Birley 1932, 211–2). This theoretical objection remains as valid now as it was in 1932 when it was made, and was raised in a slightly different form by Brian Dobson in his recent Horsley lecture, when discussing the manning of the milecastles: "Larger garrisons are sometimes postulated, but these if drawn

from the forts would cripple the units in the forts" (Dobson 1986, 15): but equally there is as little positive evidence now as there was then for the use of *numeri* in Britain under Hadrian. *Numeri* begin to be attested epigraphically on the British frontier in the early third century, when they appear side by side with auxiliary units in the outpost forts. It may be conjectured that their presence here can be pushed back into the latter part of the second century and the frontier reorganization by Commodus. Prior to this date the evidence for their presence is weak and circumstantial. The low quality of finds from the milecastles and turrets has, for example, been adduced in support of the contention that they were occupied by low quality troops while the only northern site that might reasonably be interpreted as the equivalent of a *numeruskastel* is Haltwhistle Burn—associated with the Stane-



gate rather than with Hadrian's Wall.

The absence of inscriptions relating to *numeri* need not be significant. *Numerus* inscriptions on the German *limes* do not proliferate until the Antonine period, though the structural evidence suggests the presence of *numeri* from the time of Domitian or Trajan (Baatz 1973), while we still have minimal evidence for the original *auxiliary* garrisons of the Hadrian's Wall forts (Breeze and Dobson 1987, 28).

However, when thinking about the source of the patrolling garrison we are not limited to those units stationed on or immediately adjacent to the Wall. Only about a third of Britain's auxiliary garrison was stationed on the Wall. There are the plentiful hinterland forts too. Papyri and inscriptions from Africa and the East attest soldiers outposted hundreds of miles from base, and for eighteen months at a time. Although the conditions are different here, it does illustrate the point that we need not limit our thinking to the obvious immediately adjacent sites *per lineam valli* to which the soldier could easily return home. Which brings us back to another point made by Eric Birley, in arguing his case for *numeri*. Why provide a regular system of milecastle accommodation if the troops were being sent out from the very nearby forts?

Looking at the detailed spacing of the forces along the linear frontiers, it is clear that a roughly regular pattern of 7 or 8 mile distances, was adapted according to local circumstances, topographical and human, to control roads, and rivers, to concentrate where the enemy across the border was strong. On the upper Danube in Noricum, for example, there is a very sparse presence of troops in the stretch from Passau to the Wachau, where the river flows through a narrow steep-sided valley and the area to the north is heavily forested and sparsely populated. From the Wachau to the Wienerwald, however, the river fronts the thickly populated Tullnerfeld, the stamping ground of the hostile Marcomanni: here fort sites proliferate. Reference has already been made to the suggestion that the almost exclusive use of *numeri* on the Odenwald *limes* is

connected with the sparsity of population in the area. Why then is there a concentration of troops in the central sector of Hadrian's Wall which looks out onto a sparsely populated area, rather than on its highly populated flanks? David Breeze has recently put forward an interesting explanation. He argues that the areas of fairly dense population, peopled by farmers, were relatively easy to control. The movement of strangers would soon be noticed, budding insurrections soon become common knowledge. In the open, unpopulated lands, on the other hand, dissidents could move freely, with no-one locally to observe their movements—hence the greater need for regular patrol over such regions and hence the need for troop concentrations in their vicinity (Breeze 1985). Which leads us to think about the areas and the peoples which lie beyond the frontier lines.

#### Beyond the Frontiers

A major feature of Roman frontier policy at all periods was diplomacy, the negotiation of treaties, the payment of subsidies, the installation of client kings, or as David Braund calls them “friendly kings” (Braund 1983)—friends and allies. The task of frontier control was greatly lightened if there was an ally on the border, albeit even an ally who had to be watched. Intervention in the dynastic affairs of peripheral peoples features large in the affairs of the Republic and early Empire and it is clear that Rome regarded the kingdoms of her friendly monarchs as counting as an extension of the Roman *imperium*, as coming within Rome's sphere of influence. Roman troops might even be installed in these kingdoms, to help protect them from their enemies, or to keep an eye on them themselves. The turbulent kingdom of Armenia, political football between Rome and Parthia, had a legionary detachment and a cavalry unit stationed in its territory in the mid-1st century, for example Tacitus *Annals* 12-45), and we know of several fort sites in the territory of the British ally Cogidubnus (Maxfield 1987b, 13-14).

Allied monarchs were used extensively in the diplomacy of the East: they were gradually

phased out, as the local situation demanded, during the first century, and as a result the Roman army in the East pretty well doubled in size. For example, the kingdom of Commagene was annexed by Vespasian in A.D. 72. It controlled an important Euphrates crossing, and Vespasian's pretext for the annexation was his fear that the king of Commagene was going to allow the Parthians over the vital river crossing. That crossing, at Samosata, was promptly occupied by the Roman army.

It is clear that at all periods Rome attempted to maintain some lien on the territory beyond her physical borders, to maintain diplomatic relations with its rulers and often to station troops in the trans-border territory. When Rome's Eastern frontier lay on the Euphrates she maintained forts around the Black Sea coast in the Colchis area: 1000 km to the west of the Euphrates frontier a soldier from legion XII Fulminata, based at Melitene, set up a dedication to Domitian on a rock face overlooking the Caspian Sea in what is now Soviet Azerbaijan. Quite what he was doing here is a matter of speculation. His presence has commonly been associated with the maintenance of control over movement through the important pass of Derbend, the Caspian coastal route across the Caucasus, but this view has recently been challenged (Heidenrich 1983; Braund forthcoming). To the south troops were operating deep into the Hedjaz at a time when the frontier proper (insofar as it can be defined in this area) lay in the region of the Via Traiana.

In Lower Germany there is some evidence for a direct military presence in lands across the Rhine. In A.D. 58 the Ampsivarrii complained about "lands (across the Rhine) left vacant and set apart for military purposes." Their complaint sprang from the fact that here was this land, intended for grazing animals, lying waste, while they were without land (Tacitus *Annals* 13.54). Twelve years later the Tencteri complained to the people of Cologne, about the control exercised by the Romans over access to the city: "For the Romans have barred off both river and land, almost heaven itself, to prevent us having contact with you. And, what is galling to a nation borne to arms,

they force us to approach unarmed and practically naked, to proceed only under guard and after paying a fee." (Tacitus *Histories* 4.64).

At points such as Cologne where there was an official river-crossing, it is probable that bridge-head fortifications were maintained on the outer bank. At Cologne such a fortification was certainly in existence in the early fourth-century at Köln-Deutz across the river from the city, where a Constantinian fortification was constructed. That this was not the earliest military base at Deutz, is suggested by the name of a unit known already to have been in existence in the early 3rd century, the *numerus exploratorum Divitensium* which should take its name from the place where it was stationed, Divitia, Deutz.

There is some evidence for the existence of such bridge-head forts beyond the river Danube as early as the second century. At Clementia, for example, a bridge-head fort lay across the river from Brigetio. The crossing here gave access to the route up the Vág valley to the lands of the Quadi. Rome never took over direct control of the Quadi, but attempted to exert influence over them. For example Antoninus Pius intervened in their dynastic affairs: a coin of A.D. 140 records *rex Quadi datus*, a king was given to the Quadi.

There is a growing body of evidence for Roman contact with and influence on the Quadi. Apart from purely artefactual finds, which are rich and numerous from the first century onwards, a significant number of sites of civilian character have been found with buildings which show a distinct Roman influence—bath-houses, hypocausts and the like (Pitts 1987).

Serious trouble blew up in the area in the 160s and 170s involving the Germanic Marcomanni and Quadi and the Sarmatian Iazyges. The enemy got as far as crossing the Alps and entering northern Italy. In his account of this war Cassius Dio gives us some invaluable information on the details of Roman diplomacy during and after the war, on the sort of controls exercised on the trans-border peoples. First the Quadi send envoys to Marcus in A.D. 170: he granted them concessions: but "the right to

attend markets was *not* granted to them, for fear that the Iazyges and the Marcomanni . . . should mingle with them, and passing themselves off as Quadi, should reconnoitre the Roman positions and purchase provisions." (Dio 72.11) The regulation of trading assemblies features also in the negotiations with the Marcomanni. In A.D. 175 Marcus "... returned to them one half of the neutral ground, so that they were now permitted to settle up to within 38 stades (about 5 miles) of the Danube. He established the places and days on which trading was allowed, which previously had not been fixed, and exchanged hostages with them." (Dio 71.15) Five years later, at the conclusion of the second German war, Commodus imposed further restrictions on the Marcomanni. They could assemble at only one place, once a month and in the presence of a Roman centurion. "On these conditions he made peace and abandoned all the forts in their territory beyond the neutral zone along the frontier." (Dio 72.2.4)

Looking at a map of this area, one wonders why the Roman frontier line was not simply advanced to cut across from the Danube knee to the northern Carpathians. It has been suggested that this was planned by Marcus—hence his creation of two new legions—but in the event it never happened. The land was clearly supervised, kings imposed by Rome, its peoples kept under close watch—it was hedged around with Roman troops and Roman restrictions but it remained independent. Around the Danube knee, two bridge-head fortifications exist at the river crossings at Aquincum (Budapest), Trans Aquincum and Contra Aquincum, both in existence by the later second century. They give access to the territory of the Iazyges and beyond, Dacia. Troops were stationed at Szeged and at other points along the valley of the Mures, leading into Dacia. It is ironic that it is not until the fourth century that Roman earthworks—the so-called Devil's Dykes—were thrown around the area, and then to help protect the Iazyges from invading Goths and Gepids beyond.

The reason may lie in the nature of the tribe itself, Sarmatians, nomadic horsemen, driven

west from the steppes of Kazakhstan, a people of whom the historian Florus wrote that they did not know the meaning of peace. They were not settled in the area of the Great Hungarian Plain until the first century A.D. One of the barbarian peoples, perhaps, whom Appian regarded as not worth conquering and a people whose omission from the Empire is certainly consistent with the case advanced by Professor Groenman, who argued that a native infrastructure, in the form of an urbanized level of society, is a necessary pre-requisite for a successful Roman occupation (Groenman 1980). No hint of such an infrastructure existed here.

Trouble in this area persisted. A series of inscriptions from the frontier in the area of Intercisa (modern Donauváros), attests the fact that Commodus "fortified the whole of this stretch of the river with *burgi*, built from the ground up, and with garrisons stationed at suitable points to prevent surprise crossings by bands of brigands . . ." (CIL III 3385 = ILS 395). The word used for brigands, *latrunculi* recalls the *Brittunculi* of one of the recent Vindolanda writing tablets (Inv. no. 85/32)—a very patronizing use of the diminutive form—little Britons, not a serious military foe but a wretched nuisance (Bowman and Thomas 1987, 135–7)!

Which brings us back to Britain and the situation beyond its frontier. Here we have hints of the same attempts to regulate those who live beyond the frontier. We have the outpost forts, originally just the three in the west, later supplemented by others in the east on Dere Street, and in the third century, suggestions of a patrolling system operating as far north as the Tay. Despite the objections raised by Rivet and Smith (1979, 212), Richmond and Crawford's interpretation of the *loca* beyond the Tyne-Solway frontier line as regulated meeting places where the northern tribesmen could legitimately assemble under Roman supervision remains persuasive (Richmond and Crawford 1949, 15). It accords well with known Roman practice and with what is so clearly attested by Dio in the lands beyond the middle Danube. Rome would clearly wish to avoid large unsupervised assemblies which

could be used for plotting dark deeds.

Though he was not to know it, the scenario painted by Aristides in the mid-second century was to be a short-lived one. Only a couple of decades later came the Germanic invasion across the middle Danube and the penetration of Northern Italy. Once these frontiers had been breached there was nothing to keep the invaders from the heart of the Empire. In the wake of this invasion (though not immediately after) we find walls, which in Aristides scenario are firmly on the Empire's edges, being built within the province to regulate internal movement. Unwalled towns, Rome itself notable among them, acquire walls, and the form which many of these walled circuits took was such as to devastate the nature of the civic life, carving their way through the hearts of the cities and major civic buildings. The creation of mobile field armies brought the Empire's major military force back into the heart of the Empire: once again soldiers were billeted in cities. Compulsory military service became the norm. The Golden Age, as Aristides and Appian had perceived it, had passed.

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