



## V

## Did Hadrian design Hadrian's Wall?

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## SUMMARY

*It is frequently suggested that Hadrian designed Hadrian's Wall, yet there has been no detailed analysis of this proposition. The evidence for the emperor's possible involvement is considered, together with the unusual nature of the frontier, in the light of new research on the building of the Wall. The conclusion is reached that Hadrian could have been, and probably was, involved in planning the unusual elements of the Wall which include the regularity of positioning, milecastles, forts astride the Wall, the Vallum and putative wall-walk. This allows us to reject Mommsen's argument that the greater strength of Hadrian's Wall in comparison to the German frontiers was because it was under greater military pressure.*

## HADRIAN, FRONTIERS AND THE ROMAN ARMY

**H**ADRIAN'S CLOSE INTEREST IN THE TRAINING OF HIS ARMIES and in frontiers is recorded by several ancient writers. He is recorded as visiting the frontiers in the East, on the Danube, in Germany, in Britain and in Africa. Parts of his speeches to the army in Africa survive. It is also recorded that he sought peace and obtained it through his policy of military preparedness.<sup>1</sup>

Hadrian's frontier policy in action can be observed from the beginning of his reign in 117 when he abandoned Trajan's conquests in the East.<sup>2</sup> After his actions on the Eastern frontier and the Lower Danube in the months following his accession, he returned to Rome via Pannonia (modern Hungary and Austria) where he inspected his Horse Guards swimming across the Danube fully armed.<sup>3</sup> In 121 he was in Germany. In the *Historia Augusta*, written 200 years later, it is recorded that he 'marked off the barbarians in many places, where they are separated not by rivers but by *limites*, with great posts driven into the ground and joined together like a wall'.<sup>4</sup> Although not specifically referring to Germany, this is an accurate description of the German frontier and generally taken as such (e.g. Birley 1997, 116). From Germany, Hadrian travelled to Britain where 'he put many things to right and was the first to build a wall eighty miles long to separate the barbarians from the Romans'.<sup>5</sup> His subsequent visit to Spain was interrupted by the necessity to go back to the Eastern frontier to negotiate with the Parthians in order to prevent war.<sup>6</sup> Five years later he was in Africa, where he inspected the troops in two provinces, Numidia and Mauretania Caesariensis. Among the military sites he visited was Lambaesis, base of the Third Augustan Legion, and here the text of his speech was recorded in stone. At least one fort, Gemellae, dates to Hadrian's reign (*AE* 1950, 58) and it is possible that he initiated the frontier works known as the *Fossatum Africae*.<sup>7</sup> Many of these visits, and his addresses to the army, were recorded on the coinage. The effect of Hadrian's actions was to define the limits of the empire in Europe, Africa and the East. In this way, he was following the advice and actions of Augustus, on whom he consciously modelled himself and his own actions (Boatwright 1987, 72–3, 179–81, 230).





Fig. 1 The reverse of a coin of Hadrian showing the emperor addressing the army of Spain (BMC Hadrian 1680). Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Both primary sources for the reign of Hadrian, Cassius Dio's *History of Rome* and the *Historia Augusta*, refer to Hadrian's interest in architecture. Dio, the nearest to Hadrian in time, stated that the emperor modelled and painted and implied that he designed the temple of Venus and Rome himself, putting to death the architect Apollodorus because he pointed out the errors in Hadrian's plan though the veracity of this anecdote has been challenged (Ridley 1989). The *Historia Augusta* refers to his many building works, including the villa at Tivoli, as a recent study has emphasised. Another writer states that he organised the various types of workers in the building trade on military lines.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, in this rapid review, we may note that Hadrian was a man of decided opinions who was dangerous to cross.<sup>9</sup>

## DECISION MAKING

While Hadrian clearly had a specific interest in the frontiers of the empire, a direct involvement in activities on the frontiers and an interest in architecture, did his activities extend to determining the details of the frontiers he ordered to be constructed? The direct involvement of Roman emperors in decision making is well recorded. Emperors issued instructions to new governors who reported back on at least an annual basis, for example, Agricola as recorded by Tacitus, Pliny in his letters to Trajan and Arrian in his *Circumnavigation of the Black Sea*, which is based on a report to Hadrian of his inspection of Roman forts round the Black Sea coast. Emperors called governors to heel when necessary; Claudius, for example, pulled Corbulo back across the Rhine, apparently when he exceeded his authority, and when the emperor died his authority died with him and new instructions had to be sought from his successor.<sup>10</sup> An anecdote of the reign of Hadrian emphasises the personal nature of imperial rule. Dio recorded that a woman made a request as he passed by on a journey and when he said that he did not have time to deal with her, she called out, 'cease being emperor then', at which point he paused to listen.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 2 A *sestertius* of Hadrian dating to 132–4 showing, on the reverse, the imperial barge with, presumably, the emperor enthroned between two standards.

Within that framework, it would be helpful if we understood better the respective roles of officers at different levels. Frontier installations varied from one province to another, even adjacent provinces. This can be seen most clearly in Upper Germany and Raetia. In the former, the earlier palisade was replaced by a earthen bank, while in the latter by a stone wall, causing there to be an awkward junction between the two. It would appear that governors had a certain freedom within a broad policy framework.

At the next level down, within each province, individual legions possessed their own officers in charge of building operations, surveyors, architect-engineers and so on. On Hadrian's Wall, there was clearly an overall directive that there should be gates protected by small fortlets at every mile (milecastles) and two towers regularly placed in between. The available evidence suggests that the Stone Wall was planned to be 10 Roman feet wide, the Turf Wall 20 Roman feet wide, the berm probably 20 Roman feet wide and the ditch possibly 30 Roman feet wide (Breeze 2006, 93). Standardisation is also found in buildings such as bath-houses. The assumption must be that there was an overall directive for the construction of Hadrian's Wall. It is also clear that within these instructions the legions drew up their own plans. Differences between milecastles and turrets and even sectors of the Stone Wall erected by each legion have been noted, though these differences are slight.

In summary, it would appear that overall policies were laid down, or aims enunciated, and within that framework, at each level, officers had a certain amount of freedom of action. What, then, was Hadrian's involvement in the building of Hadrian's Wall?

To many modern commentators it has been axiomatic that Hadrian designed Hadrian's Wall and, as a result, their comments are brief. Richmond (1955, 47), for example, stated that in Britain, Hadrian took 'an engineer's view of the problems'. Mattingly (2006, 156) emphasised Hadrian's interest in architecture and suggested that it is therefore likely that he had a hand in the detailed creation of his new frontier. The regularity of planning has been cited as support (Mann 1996, 167; Breeze and Dobson 2000, 40). The use of stone and the creation of a substantial stone wall has led to the suggestion that Hadrian's Wall was planned to be an enduring monument to the emperor's frontier policies (Birley 1997, 128).

C. E. Stevens was unusual in considering the relationship between Hadrian and his Wall in more detail (Stevens 1955). He accepted that Hadrian laid down the original plan, including the necessity to build part of the Wall in turf, was responsible for the regularity of planning, invented the milecastle and the Vallum, which Stevens wished to see as part of the original plan, and took the decision to move the forts from the Stanegate onto the Wall. These points are made as a series of assertions and are not supported by any argumentation.<sup>12</sup> Further, they have been overlooked within his more detailed and more wide ranging discussion of milecastle garrisons, the Brigantes, the Genounian district and the Great Wall of China, for which the paper is now generally remembered. Today, new information allows Stevens' points to be re-considered within a wider framework.

### HADRIAN IN BRITAIN

Most modern accounts of Hadrian's Wall assume that the emperor visited the northern frontier and personally ordered construction while there, or ordered amendments to a design already being executed. But did Hadrian visit the northern frontier? No ancient author explicitly states that he did, though there is plenty of evidence to suggest that. The *Historia Augusta* recorded that Hadrian ordered the construction of a wall, while it is clear, as noted above, that he personally inspected other frontiers. The poet Florus wrote a ditty about Hadrian tramping through Britain.<sup>13</sup>

The editors of *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain* drew attention to the use of the genitive on the milecastle inscriptions along the Wall, which they state is 'notable and rare. It seems less likely to indicate imperial property than to be connected with the fact that the Wall was in a very specific sense, "Hadrian's work" arising directly out of his visit to the province and probably to the line being chosen for the Wall itself' (RIB 1638). The point is that most inscriptions were dedicated to or for the emperor. The use of the genitive suggests direct action by Hadrian.

Hadrian's family name, Aelius, appears twice on the northern frontier. The bridge at Newcastle was named *Pons Aeli(i)*. It has been pointed out that few bridge names are known outside Rome, while there the bridges were often named after the builder, such as the *Pons Aelius* which crossed the Tiber in front of Hadrian's mausoleum (Bidwell and Snape 2002, 259). The name of the bridge over the Tyne could imply Hadrian's presence.

In addition, Tony Birley has noted that the dedications on twin altars found in the River Tyne, perhaps fallen from the bridge over the river are dedicated to *Oceanus* and *Neptunus* (fig. 3), the same gods to which Alexander the Great had sacrificed at the River Hydaspes on the Indus over four centuries earlier (Birley 1997, 130–1). It is a reasonable assumption that Hadrian himself chose the dedications to mark his arrival at the other end of the known world. The only counter-argument is that Kewley suggested that dedications placed on the capital of an altar usually indicated a third-century date (Kewley 1973). There is, however, insufficient space on the die for the dedication which could account for its location on the capital (Bidwell and Snape 2002, 260).

Aelius also appears on the Ilam pan, which probably dates to the second century. Four fort names are given along the top of the vessel, followed by: *rigore vali Aeli Draconis*. It is not certain how these words should be interpreted. It would appear that they record either that this was the pan of Aelius Draco, or the Aelian Wall, that is, Hadrian's Wall.

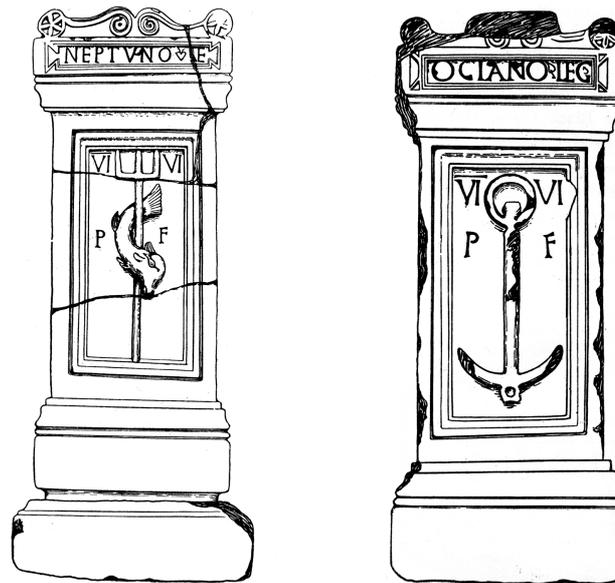


Fig. 3 The altars to *Neptunus* and *Oceanus* found in the River Tyne at Newcastle.

The *Historia Augusta* states that Hadrian came to Britain from Lower Germany.<sup>14</sup> The new governor of the province, Aulus Platorius Nepos, came from the same province. It is usually assumed that the two travelled together. A military diploma (a certificate of privileges provided for retiring soldiers) issued on 17 July 122 records the arrival of Nepos, and therefore possibly Hadrian (*CIL XVI 69*). The large number of regiments listed on the diploma has given rise to the suggestion that this was associated with the result of a directive given by the emperor (Birley 1997, 127).

### THE UNIQUE COMPONENTS OF HADRIAN'S WALL

It has long been recognised that Hadrian's Wall contains several unusual, if not unique, features. These elements are the use of stone, the size of the Stone Wall, the milecastles, the forts astride the Wall, the Vallum, the allocation — it would appear — of one regiment per fort, and the high degree of regularity and standardisation. To take each in turn.

#### The use of stone

It had been normal Roman military practice in Britain before Hadrian to construct new forts in turf and timber only replacing them in stone when the timbers rotted and the ramparts decayed. It is thus no surprise that the Hadrianic and Antonine frontiers in Germany were built of timber and the Antonine Wall in Scotland of turf.<sup>15</sup> Hadrian's Wall is unusual in containing so much stone work. It is certainly true that other frontier works were of stone, but the use of that material in north Africa presumably reflects the lack of turf and timber while the stone Raetian Wall was a replacement of an earlier timber palisade.

The crucial question therefore is, why was Hadrian's Wall not built of timber or turf? One answer could be is that there was little timber available (Birley 1997, 128). Richard Tipping has demonstrated, on the basis of pollen analysis throughout northern England and southern Scotland, that 'in the centuries following [c 500 BC], a large number of sites quite clearly depict a major clearance episode' resulting in some areas in 'the near-complete removal of trees' (Tipping 1994, 31–2). Though some regeneration subsequently occurred, the Roman army entered a very open landscape with 'substantial areas of southern Scotland almost treeless'. While the general pattern is clear, this may be too sweeping a judgement for the Hadrian's Wall corridor where timber from 400 year-old oak trees has been recovered at Vindolanda and similar aged timbers recorded at Carlisle and Papcastle (Tyers 2000, 131).

If insufficient good timber was available, turf should have been the next preferred material. It is possible, however, that insufficient good turf was available, at least in the eastern and central sectors of the Wall. The rough ground of the central sector of the Wall would not have provided good turf. From Carrawburgh eastwards to Wallsend, plough marks have been found under many sites along the Wall demonstrating the ubiquity of agriculture (Breeze 1974). The wetter, western sector of the Wall has produced less evidence for ploughing, which is what might be expected as the climate would be more conducive to pasture.

Turf was, however, used in one component of the frontier right across the country, the Vallum. Both its north and south mounds were generally revetted with turf cheeks. Yet these are slight in relation to the major turf rampart which was Hadrian's Turf Wall and do not warrant comparison. Smaller turfs could have been used in the Vallum mound revetments but rejected as too slight for a rampart.

It is possible, therefore, that the western sector was built of turf because it was available, while the lack of good turf and timber in the central and eastern sectors led to the use of stone.<sup>16</sup>

Although modern commentators place great weight on the use of stone, we may note that building in stone was not necessary to make an impression. Hadrian's biographer acknowledged that his frontier in Germany was of timber and Antoninus Pius' biographer that his frontier in north Britain was of turf.<sup>17</sup>

### The width of the Stone Wall

Even if we conclude that the use of stone in the central and eastern sectors of the Wall may simply be the result of the lack of good timber and good turf, the Stone Wall did not need to be so massive. One of the most striking features about Hadrian's Stone Wall is its very size, as recently emphasised by Peter Hill and Paul Bidwell (Hill 2006, 24; Bidwell 2008, 130–3). It was certainly wider than other Roman frontier walls. The Raetian Wall, built in the late second century was only 1.2 m wide compared to the 3 m wide Hadrian's Wall. Birley (1977, 128) in acknowledging that 'lack of suitable forests to furnish the posts for the palisade may have been the basic reason' for the use in stone, goes on to suggest that 'once it was seen to be necessary to build the new frontier in stone, there was scope for something on the grand scale'.

Bidwell's recent paper presents strong arguments in favour of the existence (or planning) of a wall-walk, including the thickness of the Wall, the existence of chamfered stones fallen from the top of the Wall and the blocking of the turret recesses when these structures were demolished (Bidwell 2008).



Fig. 4 Milecastle 42 (Cawfields). Reproduced by kind permission of English Heritage.

#### Milecastles (fig. 4)

While fortlets had been constructed by the Roman army over the previous century, they were larger than the milecastles of Hadrian's Wall. These small structures were uniquely invented for Hadrian's Wall (Stevens 1955, 390) and are found on no other frontier apart from the Antonine Wall. The gaps in the German frontier tended to be supervised from an adjacent tower with, usually, only the major routes supervised by a small fort and/or fort, such as the combination at Degerfeld and Butzbach (Hodgson 2005, 184–5, Baatz 1993, 153–4). The small forts in Upper Germany and Raetia tend to be of a size to hold a century of about 80 men and are therefore considerably larger than the milecastles of Hadrian's Wall. There is one structure on the Raetian frontier which has been compared to a milecastle, the 'fortlet' at Dalkingen, but its uniqueness emphasises that this is the exception which proves the rule (Baatz 1993, 263–5). The milecastles of Hadrian's Wall would appear to be a particular reaction to a particular situation (Hill 2006, 15).

#### Forts

The original plan for the Wall was for a linear barrier with milecastles and turrets and the forts to the south retained. During building work, new forts were ordered to be constructed, and they were uniquely placed astride the linear barrier. The 'normal' fort plan was amended. The main gates of each fort were double portal (often fort gates might have only one portal)

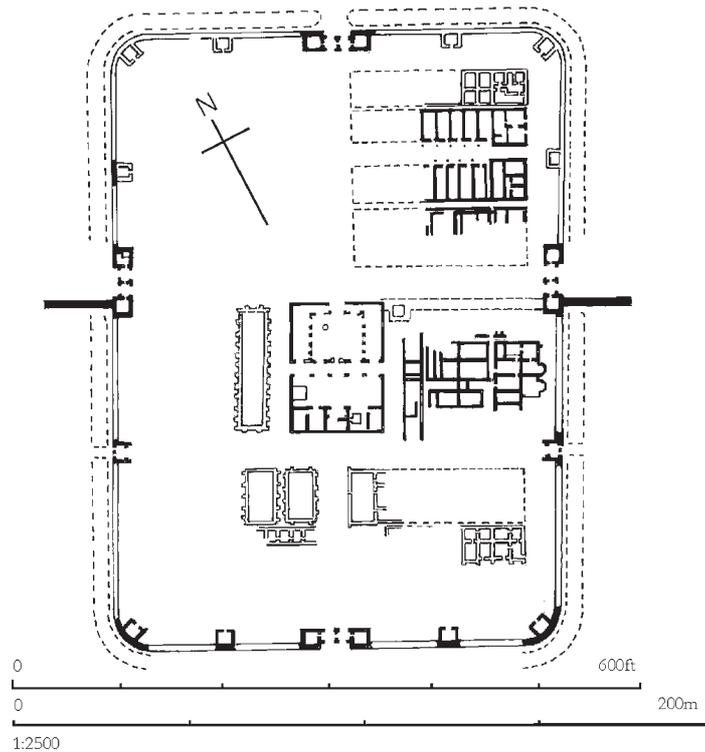


Fig. 5 Plan of Chesters fort showing its relationship to the Wall.

while a new, unique provision were the single-portal side gates placed south of the Wall at each end of the *via quintana* (fig. 5). The whole impression is that the two actions — forts astride the Wall and additional side gates — were to improve the mobility of the army. This, perhaps, gains some support from the fact that the later forts to be constructed, such as Great Chesters and Carrawburgh, were built behind the linear barrier, though still attached to the Wall. It would appear that the army had realised that once forts were placed on the line of the Wall, it was not necessary for them to project to the north. On no other frontier were forts placed astride the Wall — they are usually a short distance behind — and even on the Antonine Wall, where all but two forts were attached to the Wall, no fort projected to the north.

### The Vallum (fig. 6)

C. E. Stevens rightly marked out that the fort decision and the Vallum were noteworthy. He argued that 'the concept of [the Vallum] could only come from an adventurous and imaginative mind, able furthermore to enforce its adventurous imagination, and in fact from the mind of Hadrian himself' (Stevens 1966, 39). This led Stevens to suggest that the construction of the Wall started before the arrival of the emperor and these unique changes were made on the orders of the emperor during his inspection of work in progress.

On balance, it has always seemed to me that the greater decision was that to build the Wall, the later changes resulting from the fact that the Wall was something new and was amended



Fig. 6 The Wall (to the left) and the Vallum (to the right) at Cawfields looking east.

as the army responded to the implications of the decision to build it. The decision to place the forts astride the Wall may therefore be seen as a reaction to a particular situation, the need to provide the troops with more manoeuvrability. It is tempting to see the Vallum in the same light, a reaction to a particular situation, which may, in this case, have been local unrest in the face of the construction of the Wall, not least as it was never replicated on later frontiers.

Stevens' argument, however, has received some support from an unexpected source. The construction of the frontier in Germany has generally been linked to the visit of the emperor in 121. The 119/20 date for a timber used on the German frontier, however, suggests that there planning — and possibly even construction — preceded the arrival of the emperor and the possibility of the same occurring in Britain cannot be ruled out (Schallmeyer 2005, 802).

### Forts and Units

With the exception of Drumburgh, every fort on the line of Hadrian's Wall, and down the Cumbrian coast, was large enough to hold a whole auxiliary regiment. Although it must be emphasised that we know little of the internal arrangements of the Hadrianic forts, our assumption has generally been that each fort was the base for a single unit. The assigning of one unit to each fort is somewhat unusual. It has been assumed that in the late first century

forts were built to hold a single unit, but as more excavations of complete forts take place this simple relationship becomes more difficult to justify. No late first century fort in Britain has furnished the appropriate number and style of barrack-blocks for a known size of unit.

The Hadrian's Wall pattern of one unit per fort does not appear on the Antonine Wall. Here there are relatively few cases where the direct relationship of one unit to one fort can be demonstrated, while several forts were too small to have held a complete unit, especially when the soldiers attested there were legionaries rather than auxiliaries (Breeze and Dobson 2000, 110–3).

### Regularity and Standardisation

Hadrian's Wall exhibits considerable regularity in planning, which is not the case on other Roman frontiers. The precision in the spacing of milecastles and turrets aided the recovery of so much of the original plan for the Wall in the early twentieth century. When necessary, the plan could be amended, as David Woolliscroft (1989) has demonstrated. He noted that several milecastles and turrets were moved a little out of their measured position in order to maintain communication with the sites behind the Wall. In short, the Wall was more sophisticated than our earlier belief in a rigid blue-print would have us believe. There is an exception to this regularity, the extra tower in Peel Gap (Breeze 2006, 259–60), but its uniqueness (at least, as yet) again emphasises that it is the exception that proves the rule.

The use of stone may be an important element in the regularity of spacing of the Wall structures. The materials used in constructing buildings would have had an effect on the nature of the building processes and led to a different attitude of mind on the part of the builders. It is, for example, easier to make changes to timber constructions than to stone. If a new entrance had been required on the German frontier, it would have been possible simply to remove two or three posts to create a gap. On Hadrian's Wall, however, a whole section of stone wall or turf rampart would have had to be removed. It might have been regarded easier to issue instructions for a regular pattern of gates — and towers — rather than to work out in advance where they would be required and make any necessary changes later.<sup>18</sup>

## DISCUSSION

Can we determine whether Hadrian's Wall was designed by Hadrian? It is a reasonable assumption that Hadrian travelled to the frontier zone and was involved in the decision making process, and, bearing in mind that linear barriers were a new element in the range of frontier installations employed by the army, that he ordered its construction. Nevertheless, we should note that the presence of the emperor was not necessary for decisions relating to the frontiers of the empire. For example, the dendrochronological date of 119/20 from the German palisade suggests that the construction of this frontier started before the visit of the emperor in 121, while no one has suggested that the laying out of part of the Outer Limes in Germany in a long straight stretch was the result of the personal intervention of the emperor, in that case Antoninus Pius. Emperors are well attested as issuing orders relating to frontiers or foreign policy while residing in Rome or elsewhere in the empire.<sup>19</sup>

It is possible to argue that the availability of building materials led to the construction of part of the Wall in stone and part in turf. The use of such materials, rather than the timber

used on the German frontier, in turn could have led to the regularity of planning and indeed perhaps also to the invention of the milecastle, a new type of structure required to protect a new type of feature, a gap in the linear barrier.<sup>20</sup> The difficulties in making changes to a stone structure rather than a timber building may have led to the regularity in planning on Hadrian's Wall. Nevertheless, there was a different outlook on display on Hadrian's Wall as the gaps in the German palisade were only supervised from a tower whereas fortlets were provided on the British frontiers. Further, the use of stone did not necessarily carry with it the construction of a massive Stone Wall. It is the various unique elements of Hadrian's Wall — in particular the size of the Stone Wall, the position of the forts astride the Wall and the Vallum — which strongly imply the involvement of the emperor.

Hitherto, in view of the duration of the building programme, we have assumed that Hadrian could only have been involved in one decision, that to build the Wall or to implement the later changes, both containing unique elements. Peter Hill has suggested otherwise. He has argued that initial work on the Broad Stone Wall and its attendant structures could have been quicker than we have previously believed, and, therefore, 'if Hadrian spent three or four months in Britain, there would have been ample time for him to have made the initial decision and to have revised the plans to include forts before he left' (Hill 2006, 125). In short, the emperor could have been responsible for the unique elements of the first plan — the size of the Stone Wall and perhaps the invention of the milecastle — and also those of the amended scheme — the forts astride the Wall and the Vallum.

All these combined factors — the various unique elements and the presumed direct involvement of the emperor himself — emphasise that Hadrian's Wall was *sui generis*. If we want to understand the nature and purpose of Roman frontiers, we would be better to study those in Germany, which are slighter in every way and more obviously concerned with frontier control, as Mommsen recognised 150 years ago (Mommsen 1964, 165–6), and, incidentally, are very similar to modern instruments of frontier control (Stevens 1955, 386 made the same point).

Modern linear barriers are essentially simple in intent, though they may be complex in design. Their purpose is to prevent the free movement of people and ensure that entry or exit is only at certain points. The modern barrier is usually a 'fence' of metal or concrete, overseen from towers and supplemented by traps, trip-wires, lights and so on.<sup>21</sup> None of these items serve a military purpose. These barriers are manned by frontier guards and the main army units are based elsewhere. In the event of war, these barriers would be flattened within minutes. Their purpose is, as Hadrian's biographer stated, to separate 'them' from 'us'. In spite of its massive nature, the primary purpose of Hadrian's Wall was frontier control, as stated by Hadrian's biographer, and which was the essential message of Collingwood's article on the purpose of Hadrian's Wall (Collingwood, 1921; cf. Mann 1996, 165–8). This is underlined by the nature of the first plan for the Wall for, at that stage, no army units were placed on the barrier (Breeze and Dobson 2000, 39).

The existence of so many unique elements to Hadrian's Wall opens up the possibility of others (noted by Bidwell and Holbrook 1989, 34). The Wall may have been so substantial and have been provided with a wall-walk simply because that was the form of wall Hadrian knew. Crow has suggested that Hadrian was familiar with earlier Greek long walls and built in their manner (Crow 1991, 57–8). This may be a simpler explanation than seeking to argue that patrolling along the top of Hadrian's Wall was necessary in view of the British weather or the existence of dark nights, not least because it seems strange that these considerations did not affect the builders of other Roman frontiers.

It is often suggested that a parapet was necessary to protect patrolling soldiers from being hit by weapons thrown by their enemies. While there is archaeological evidence from north Britain that these enemies had spears, evidence for bows and arrows at this time is non-existent and for sling shot and throwing stones slight. This, however, may merely reflect absence of evidence, for arrows were used in Britain down to the Bronze Age and metal arrowheads known on the continent in the Iron Age while Pictish symbol stones depict bows and arrows. The accepted throwing distance (as opposed to effective killing range) of the spear of a Roman soldier was about 30 m (Breeze 2002, 883–4), though this is greater than the 15–20 m achieved by the acknowledged inexperienced members of the Quinta Society for throwing javelins (Griffiths 1993, 11). We may pause to consider how much protection would be required for soldiers walking along the top of Hadrian's Wall against weapons thrown or fired from a minimum of 16 m away — and upwards — assuming that the best position to throw was from the exposed position on the top of the upcast mound to the north of the ditch.<sup>22</sup>

### MOMMSEN AND ROMAN FRONTIERS

Theodor Mommsen considered the problem of the differences between the German and British frontiers. He stated: 'Thus these [i.e. the German] extensive military structures had not, like the Britannic wall, the object of checking the invasion of the enemy. Rather the intention was that, like the bridges over the river frontier, so the roads on the land-frontier should be commanded by the forts, but in other respects, like the river as the water-boundary, so the wall on the landward should hinder the uncontrolled crossing of the frontier. ... the proper and immediate object of the structure was to prevent the crossing of the frontier. ... The Romans in upper Germany did not confront their neighbours as they confronted the Highlanders of Britain, in whose presence the province was always in a state of siege.' (Mommsen 1968, 165). In short, the British frontiers were stronger because they were under more military pressure than the German frontiers.

Stevens rejected the suggestion that 'the boundary was so solid' because 'the enemy to the north was so formidable', arguing that Hadrian, in building the Wall, created 'an artificial island of the Britain already subdued', citing Thucydides as support (Stevens 1955, 387–8).

I believe that we can now offer an alternative explanation for the differences between the frontiers in Britain and Germany and that is the direct involvement of Hadrian in creating Hadrian's Wall. If this is accepted, we should not be beguiled by the massive and unique nature of Hadrian's Wall into believing that it served a military purpose.

However, while we may be able to explain the unusual nature of Hadrian's Wall by pleading the involvement of the emperor, that argument will not extend to the Antonine Wall, which was built on broadly similar principles. The answer may simply be an extension of Gillam's argument, that the Antonine Wall was primarily a copy of Hadrian's Wall (Gillam 1976).

### CONCLUSION

Hadrian's Wall, we may conclude, was the creation of the emperor himself. His involvement, however, could remove from the discussion much of the rational argument above. Was the emperor concerned about the lack of timber? Did he chose to build in stone, for whatever reason, but if so why was not the whole frontier erected in stone? If the lack of timber led to



the use of other materials, did he decide to build on the grand scale (Birley 1997, 128) or simply order the building of a substantial stone wall similar to those structures he knew, city walls? This might explain the possible existence of a wall-walk, which I would still regard as unnecessary on a Roman frontier as on a modern one. If Hadrian's Wall was the physical manifestation of, or compensation for, Hadrian's intention not to expand the empire, why was the Wall not entirely of stone? We should also allow the possibility that Hadrian was disappointed with the German palisade, started seemingly before his visit, and ordered the construction of something more spectacular in Britain. Acknowledgement of the presence of the emperor and his involvement in the planning and construction of the Wall will, however, allow new comments on old problems. The suggestion that the western sector was built in turf for speed in the face of a threat from beyond the frontier in this area is unlikely to be true. Surely the emperor would have dealt with any such threat by military action?

The very unusual nature of Hadrian's Wall renders arguments about the purpose of the Wall based only upon the nature of that frontier difficult to maintain. It remains clear that other frontiers had no soldiers patrolling along their tops and even if soldiers did use Hadrian's Wall as an elevated sentry walk as Collingwood (1921) argued, the involvement of the emperor in its design does not allow it to be used as the exemplar of Roman frontiers.<sup>23</sup>

I have purposefully avoided discussing the possible role of Hadrian's Wall as a symbol, for example, of Roman might or as a displacement activity for expansion or its possible purpose as a protective barrier to aid the peaceful exploitation of the province to the south (Birley 1956, 32–3), because such suggestions are difficult to prove. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Hadrian's Wall was seen in its day as special as is demonstrated by the production of the little bowls, the Rudge Cup, Amiens Skillet and Ilam Pan.

In view of the close interest that any emperor took in the affairs of state, and especially Hadrian, it would be facile to suggest that it was the departure of the emperor in the middle of the building process which led to changes without his knowledge such as the reduction in the standard of craftsmanship noted by Hill (2006, 140–4), the narrowing of the Stone Wall and the construction of the later forts behind the Wall, though still attached to it (Breeze and Dobson 2000, 47–59). Some aspects of Hadrian's Wall — the attachment of the forts to the Wall and the milecastles — were repeated on the Antonine Wall, though neither are seen on the German frontiers. The Vallum, however, was not repeated on the Antonine Wall, though Bailey has argued that one was planned (Bailey 1994). The challenges offered by the strange nature of Hadrian's Wall continue, and this paper is offered merely as a contribution to that continuing debate.

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## APPENDIX

In a valuable contribution to *Understanding Hadrian's Wall*, Paul Bidwell collates and interprets the evidence which might be thought to support the provision of a wall-walk along the top of Hadrian's Wall. The evidence is not conclusive, as Bidwell notes, but it is suggestive (Bidwell 2008, 141). Two points made by Bidwell require further consideration.

Richard Bellhouse assumed that there was a wall-walk and went on to argue that on the Turf Wall, 'The side doors would be farther back from the front than in Stone-wall turrets because of the slope of the front of the Turf-wall and the need for room for a parapet and unobstructed passage on to the centre of the parapet-wall. This may be the explanation of the fact that some Turf-wall turrets project about 3 ft [90 cm] beyond the later Stone-Wall, the new parapet-walk, the width of the Wall and the position of the existing doorways determining the line of the Wall' (Bellhouse 1969, 88–91). Bidwell regards this argument as 'compelling'. However, for a rule to be compelling, all, or at least most, of the known examples have to conform, and that is not the case. In only nine instances is the distance between the front wall of the turret and the stone wall known, and only two turrets actually conform to the 'Bellhouse rule' (Ts 72a and 72b, both 1.22 m). In three examples the stone wall is set back between 75 and 90 cm (Ts 54b and 55a — 76 cm; 56b — 84 cm), while at the remaining four the distance is less than 60 cm (Ts 51a, 51b, 52a and 53a: Bellhouse unfortunately specified the wrong measurement for T 53a). The fact that some turrets did not conform to his theory was known to Bellhouse and he argued that in these cases the turrets could have been rebuilt and the position of the doorway changed. Collingwood proposed that the stone wall was set further back in order to leave a wider berm for safety reasons, i.e. to 'prevent the weight of the Wall from crushing the lip of the ditch' (Collingwood 1931, 52–3). In the *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, I suggested that the replacement wall was normally erected in the most stable position, which I saw as the centre of the demolished Turf Wall. Bidwell (2008, 134) pointed out that this may not have been the most stable position and in any case the relationship between the Stone Wall and the Turf Wall may be irrelevant as the new Stone Wall was provided with its own foundations and therefore any location was likely to be stable. It may be safer to assume that the decision was left to the builders on the spot.<sup>24</sup>

The second point concerns the provision of defensive weapons to soldiers. In the *Handbook*, I erroneously stated that 'it is fair to state that they were not equipped with defensive weapons' (Breeze 2006, 110). What I should have written was that Roman soldiers were not well provided with defensive weapons. I had no excuse in making that statement as its incorrectness had already been pointed out by Coulston, who remarked that it was 'possibly a subconscious over-statement of the truism that the two British Walls were not used as fighting platforms and that the army preferred to seek out the enemy in the field' (Coulston 1985, 295). Roman soldiers certainly were provided with defensive weapons, which I discussed in Breeze 2002, cited by Bidwell. To support his case that soldiers were provided with defensive weapons, Bidwell cites Coulston (1985, 283): 'archery was widely practised by military units' and that soldiers were trained in the use of the bow for mural defensive. However, in the same article, Coulston goes on to say, 'it would be an exaggeration to suggest that virtually all soldiers in the Roman army could have practiced archery at some point in their careers. However, archery equipment was much more widely employed than might be expected judging solely by regimental titles' ... 'weapons stores in forts must be envisaged as having had a few bows, bundles of arrows, bundles of light javelins, perhaps shaped stones for throwing

and dropping...’ (my italics), hardly a ringing endorsement for the presence of defensive weapons. There are few finds of missiles from turrets and milecastles. Bidwell can only include in his list spearheads from eight turrets (each soldier was normally provided with two spears), throwing balls from three, an arrowhead and a ballista-bolt from one each and possible sling-stones from two (Bidwell, 2008, 140). To this total can be added the weapons from milecastles: there are weapons from MCs 9 (the chape of a sword scabbard); 35 (eight spearheads, an artillery bolthead, two arrowheads, a dagger and a chape); 48 (five spearheads, a clay sling bullet, and the chape of a sword scabbard); 54 (three spearheads); 79 (three spearheads), and from some milefortlets on the Cumbrian coast: 5 (two spearheads) and 21 (arrow- or bolt-head) (most of these items are listed in Breeze 2006; see also Jilek and Breeze 2007). Only Housesteads appears in Coulston’s list of Wall forts at which arrow-heads have been found, though some have been recovered at Corbridge and Vindolanda on the Stanegate. In total, these are not a lot of weapons from military installations which were occupied for 250 years.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian* 10–11; 23, 1; Cassius Dio, *History of Rome* 69, 5, 2–3; 69, 9; Aurelius Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus* 14, 4; Fronto, *de Feriis Alsiansibus* 3, 5; *Principia Historiae* 8–9; cf. Davies 1989. Africa: CIL VIII 18042 = ILS 2487, 9133, 9134, 9135, 9135a. Military preparedness: Cassius Dio, *History of Rome* 69, 5, 1; 69, 5, 5; *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian* 10, 1. For a review of Hadrian’s frontiers see Maxfield 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Cassius Dio, *History of Rome* 69, 8, 33; *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian* 9.

<sup>3</sup> Cassius Dio, *History of Rome* 69, 9, 6 with ILS 2558.

<sup>4</sup> *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian* 12.6.

<sup>5</sup> *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian* 11.2.

<sup>6</sup> *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian* 12.8.

<sup>7</sup> This was the view of Eric Birley (1956) though most of the dating evidence from the frontier is later.

<sup>8</sup> Cassius Dio, *History of Rome* 69, 3, 2; 69, 4; *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian*, 19–20; 26; Boatwright 2003; Fraser 2006; *Epitome de Caesaribus* 14.5 (I owe this reference to Paul Bidwell).

<sup>9</sup> Cassius Dio, *History of Rome* 69, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Tacitus, *Agricola* 39; *Annals* 11, 19. Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18. 5. 1; *The Jewish War* 4, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Cassius Dio, *History of Rome* 69, 6, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Some of the points are repeated in Stevens 1966, 86–88, again without argued justification.

<sup>13</sup> *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian*, 16, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian*, 10–11.

<sup>15</sup> Hanson 2009. Most of the forts on the Antonine Wall only had principal buildings of stone, the rest being of timber while in all but two cases the ramparts were of turf. The legionary base at Carpow on the Tay, built in the early third century, followed the same pattern.

<sup>16</sup> While acknowledging that this turns the normal argument on its head, it must be emphasised that there are problems with all other arguments which seek to explain the use of turf. These arguments include the lack of good building stone in the west, even though the wall was later rebuilt in stone; the lack of mortar, even though very little mortar was used in the Stone Wall; a need to complete the wall in the west in turf owing to hostile elements beyond the frontier: surely, this is to ignore the strength of the Roman army and the probability that it would deal with any such opposition before commencing the building of the frontier. The existence of three outpost forts to the north of the Wall is often cited as indicating that there was a special need to protect this western sector, but we have no contemporary statement of their purpose and this remains a modern assumption. Most recently, Hanson (2009, 37) argues that turf was used ‘to avoid excessive delay



given the shortage of lime mortar beyond the Red Rock fault: conversion to stone could then proceed at leisure.'

<sup>17</sup> *Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian* 12, 6, *Life of Antoninus Pius* 5.

<sup>18</sup> It may be noted that drains only appear to have been placed in the Stone Wall where they were thought necessary, but when the Turf Wall was rebuilt in stone drains were provided at regular intervals, at least in the 5 miles running west from the River Irthing: Breeze and Dobson 2000, 30–1.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Antoninus Pius: Fronto quoted by Eumenius, *Panegyrico Constantii* 14.

<sup>20</sup> It would be helpful if the function of the milecastle was better understood: cf. B. Dobson, 'The function of Hadrian's Wall', *AA*<sup>5</sup>, 14 (1986) 9–17.

<sup>21</sup> The purpose of the newly discovered pits on the berms of both Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall can be seen in this light.

<sup>22</sup> A further element provided on Hadrian's Wall — and the Antonine Wall — but not the original German frontiers, was a ditch. Bidwell (2008, 135) draws a connection between the presence of a ditch and the existence of a wall-walk on the basis that a ditch would require surveillance from a wall-walk. The situation on the Antonine Wall would appear to belie this suggestion. The berm is often as much as 10 m wide and in admittedly unusual circumstances on Croy Hill extends 30 m wide while the ditch lies several metres below the base of the rampart, with the shape of the land precluding observation of the ditch from the rampart (Robertson 2001, 12).

<sup>23</sup> There remain problems about the source of the soldiers who undertook the frontier control duties. It would make little sense if the cavalry which are attested at several forts were used in such duties.

<sup>24</sup> The location of the Stone Wall in relation to the Turf Wall has been noted at other places, including MC 72 where its north wall was only 0.36 m behind the front edge of the Turf Wall (Austen 1994, 51) and MC 77 where it appears to have been erected immediately behind the demolished Turf Wall (*Britannia* 5 (1974) 412).

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