BOOK REVIEWS

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David J. Breeze, *Hadrian's Wall: A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, Extra Series 42, 2014), pp. xx + 172, 78 illus. ISBN 978 1 873124 67 3. £18.

Research on Hadrian's Wall has repeatedly elicited statements to the effect that our knowledge of the monument is now complete. Mortimer Wheeler's intervention in 1961 is perhaps the most infamous, when he stated that 'Hadrian's Wall … has long ceased to matter as a major historical problem' (*Antiquity* 35, 159). In this, Wheeler echoed Richmond's declaration, a decade earlier, that 'the principal periods in the history of the monument were firmly fixed' (*Journal of Roman Studies* 40, 43). Although this reflects no more than a staunch — and misguided — faith that the 'Wall-periods framework' provided an overarching chronological narrative for the frontier, it harked back to earlier statements in a similar vein. In 1855, upon learning of the discovery of the Knag Burn gate, Bruce 'congratulated the Chairman on this interesting discovery, which might be said to complete and clinch their knowledge of the Wall' (*PSAN* 1855, 57). From a modern perspective, these proclamations of intellectual victory appear precipitous, to put it mildly. Cumulatively, such comments continue to cast a shadow over research, as they foster a tenacious belief among non-specialists that Hadrian's Wall has been 'done'. As David Breeze observes in *A History of Archaeological Thought*, however, when 'they stated that they had solved all the problems of Hadrian's Wall … what they meant was that they had solved the problems that interested them'. Breeze's latest book not only details what those interests were, it also serves as an apt epitaph for the interpretative doctrines whose perceived inviolability generated such complacency.

A History of Archaeological Thought is not the first book to ponder the Wall's intellectual legacy. Hingley's *Hadrian's Wall: A Life*, published in 2012, assessed the political, cultural, and religious influence of the Roman border, but was less concerned with the accumulation of archaeological data. As Breeze's book focuses on the acquisition and analysis of such evidence, these two volumes can be considered complementary. *A History of Archaeological Thought* is closer in style to Birley's magisterial *Research on Hadrian's Wall*, which was published in 1961, the same year Wheeler iterated that the frontier was no longer a major concern. With hindsight this can be viewed as the high-water mark for the Wall-periods framework. This chronological straightjacket held that as long as any frontier installation, be it a turret, milecastle, or fort, remained in operation, it would display the same structural history as every other Wall structure. The framework had its genesis in Gibson and Simpson's seminal 1909 excavations at milecastle 48, and was refined by the 1929 discoveries at Birdoswald. Although cracks in the doctrine were beginning to appear by the late 1950s, it was only in 1976 that the publication of Breeze and Dobson's *Hadrian's Wall* administered the *coup de grâce* and established the template for studying the frontier that endures to this day. As the fortieth anniversary of that seismic shift in Wall studies approaches, *A History of*

Archaeological Thought provides a timely opportunity to bring the story of its study up to date and take stock of where scholarship is now.

Although Breeze's text spans the period from the *c*. fourth-century *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* to 2014, his attention focuses on the late nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries. For Breeze, the year zero of scientific research on Hadrian's Wall is 1892. Unlike the death of an idea that ushered in the current phase of research in 1976, the late-nineteenth-century revolution coincided with the death of an individual: John Collingwood Bruce. Revered as the doyen of Wall studies for over four decades, Bruce was posthumously castigated for holding back progress in his twilight years. The situation was memorably evoked by a description of the 'young bloods' in Newcastle with their 'heretical' thoughts, waiting until the great man died to 'awake the slumbering problems of the Wall' (Nielson *AA*^{3}, 8, 37–45). For Breeze, though, it was not the passing of a formidable figure so much as the excavation of turret 44b by J. P. Gibson that made 1892 notable. Using archaeological techniques to identify discrete phases of activity within the turret places this modest exploration at the dawn of a period characterised by a rapid increase in knowledge through disciplined excavation. This new approach proved particularly successful when it came to solving the problem of the day: disentangling the structural relationship between the various frontier components.

Early digging on Hadrian's Wall generally focused on exhuming structures from promising looking humps and bumps. The 1848 work at milecastle 42, for instance, sought to 'clear away the debris' rather than harvest information about the structure itself. The unexpected discovery of a frontier gateway in the milecastle did, though, demonstrate excavation's potential to recast debate. Indeed, the discovery that the frontier was not simply an uninterrupted curtain barring northern aggression invigorated discourse about the Wall's purpose. Subsequent excavations in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century deviated from this approach by pursuing a rigorous question-and-answer approach to acquiring knowledge, and trenching sites that could advance a research agenda. The value of this work is highlighted by Breeze's conclusion that current knowledge of the rebuilding of the Turf Wall 'merely relates to where Simpson and Richmond stopped investigating … in 1936'. The debt owed to such pioneering excavators extends far further, however. The chapters forming the core of *A History of Archaeological Thought* investigate the relationships between the Wall elements, the building sequence, the Wall foundations, whether Hadrian designed the Wall, when the Turf Wall was rebuilt in stone, the history of the Wall, who manned it, and its function. These were all questions that exercised investigators in the first half of the twentieth century, or shortly afterwards. Breeze's text also reflects the focus on the second century, and in particular Hadrian's reign, which epitomised their enquiries. While subsequent scholarship has significantly refined our understanding of these aspects, in many cases discourse remains rooted in early to mid-twentieth century fieldwork.

One area that has received substantial attention in the last four decades is the question of the Wall's purpose. There are two modern schools of thought, which can be crudely summarised as predicating a barrier intended to regulate the peaceful movement of people, or a military stop line designed to frustrate an invasion. *A History of Archaeological Thought* reveals how unusual it is for such opposing doctrines to co-exist in Wall studies, but both interpretations have grown organically out of Breeze and Dobson's 1976 assertion of the primacy of the archaeological data. The military barrier model emphasises that the scale of Hadrian's Wall is out of proportion to other contemporary Roman frontiers, and therefore

more conventionally defensive in character. In contrast, the population regulation thesis asserts that the frontiers shared a unity of purpose and that the Wall's monumental character reveals more about the ego of its progenitor: the emperor Hadrian. These competing viewpoints have polarised interpretation of various components of the frontier fabric.

Controversy regarding whether there was a wall-walk, which has perceived defensive connotations and is demonstrably absent from the German frontier, is a classic example of how debate about function has coloured views of structural elements. Following Bidwell's demonstration that multiple strands of circumstantial evidence point to the presence of such a feature, Breeze now accepts that a wall-walk existed, but maintains 'such a feature was not necessary on a Roman frontier, a position which many will regard as trying to square a circle'. The contemporary indigenous populations are presumably relevant to this debate. On the German land frontier, indigenous activity was concentrated along the Lahn valley. Elsewhere, long stretches of the border bisected terrain that lay several days travel from the nearest attested settlements. The eastern stretch of Hadrian's Wall, however, severed agricultural land tilled by a sizeable rural population. This divergent disruption to indigenous interests could easily have made the greater level of control a wall-walk afforded seem proportionate on Hadrian's Wall and superfluous on the German *Limes*. In general, the impact of indigenous populations on frontier design remains surprisingly underexplored, given that controlling their movement must have been integral to the purpose of the borders. Nevertheless, important work has been undertaken by Jobey, Hunter, and Hodgson, among others, and an assessment of changing perceptions of the indigenous population would provide a useful counterpoint to the military infrastructure.

As well as offering a sobering reminder of just how few theories stand the test of time, Breeze illustrates how interpretations can fall in and out of fashion. The observation made by Horsley, Bruce, Collingwood, and Birley that Hadrian's Wall is essentially a hybrid combining a barrier against low-intensity threats with a springboard for advance north has recently been restated by Graafstal (2012). Increasing interest in the threat posed by raiding makes it possible that this thesis is set to re-emerge as an influential model. The marked differences between the original plan for Hadrian's Wall and that apparent after the 'fort decision' are certainly redolent of two awkwardly superimposed concepts. As the list of knock-on effects seemingly triggered by the 'fort decision' continues to lengthen, it is becoming apparent that we may still underestimate the extent to which the frontier was reconfigured during construction. An apparently sharp reduction in manpower within the milecastles in favour of the forts arguably amounts to the difference between a dispersed and concentrated deployment pattern along the curtain. As these configurations are best suited to meet different types of threat, it could imply that either the army initially misjudged the nature of the opposition it faced, or that commencing construction of Hadrian's Wall accentuated resistance. It will be interesting to see how these themes, among many others, develop over the coming years.

Considering the road ahead, Breeze observes 'many papers have chipped away at the fabric of *Hadrian's Wall*, but no one has overturned the central theses …'. Techniques such as LiDAR could significantly augment our knowledge, while new interpretative models may vie with prevailing perceptions of frontier function, but there is little sign of a revolution to equal the advent of scientific excavation or the collapse of an interpretative house of cards. In *Hadrian's Wall* Breeze and Dobson were surely right to advocate the pre-eminence of the archaeological record and this seems set to prove a durable legacy. *A History of Archaeological*

Thought deserves to become essential reading for anyone interested in Wall studies, as it provides an authoritative and lucid account penned by a key interlocutor. As Breeze acknowledges, his text does not address more recent research into rural and urban settlement, environmental evidence, or material culture, and only pays lip service to the post-Roman transition. Nevertheless, Breeze provides an unrivalled account of how the issues that arrested scholars in the late nineteenth century have influenced and informed subsequent studies. While we may regret that early excavators invested so much effort on a comparatively narrow time-span, their work raised the foundations on which modern studies are built. As new avenues of exploration continue to emerge, and biases in the datasets are ironed out, we can be confident that far from being all over, our knowledge of Hadrian's Wall is only just beginning.

GRAAFSTAL, E. P. 2012 'Hadrian's haste: a priority programme for the Wall', *AA*^{5}, 41, 123–84.

Matthew Symonds

Peter D. Wright, *Life on the Tyne: Water Trades on the Lower River Tyne in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, a Reappraisal* (Ashgate Publishing, Farnham 2014) pp. xviii + 199, 12 illus. ISBN 978 1 4724 2633 8. £70.

Although the second book to appear on a broadly similar theme in recent years, this attractive new volume should be considered in its own right. It is a thorough piece of original research which helps provide new insight into the intricate occupational milieu and port economy of the early modern Tyne. Peter Wright's approach is broad ranging, attempting (with the exception of river pilots) to encompass the full gamut of waterway based occupations on the tidal river, and intersperses this account with allied maritime topics: all in just seven succinct chapters.

First, the contemporary coal trade scene. Sustained by this dominant and nationally significant outward trade, the port of Newcastle's entire commerce was controlled by a class of transaction facilitators (the hostmen) who, in turn, were reliant on a labour intensive mode of shore-to-ship conveyance that deployed hundreds of bonded workmen operating archaic watercraft: 'keels'. Locally, the story may be a familiar one but the author's factually well supported introduction will benefit readers elsewhere. Next follows a sound, refreshingly navigation-based, reassessment of the known difficulties of access to the port during the period. This highlights the distance of the town and the trade's coal pits from the sea, and a fickle waterway whose shallow unstable course was exacerbated by manmade intervention: ballast disposal. Using previously unexplored municipal accounts, what follows is the most revealing description of this practice, or malpractice, yet published.

Moving explicitly on, two chapters identify and describe the work patterns, carrier functions and employment numbers of the water tradesmen, convincingly fixing the parish of All Saints (Newcastle) as their domestic stronghold. Despite recognised limitations, its parish records are analysed in depth and prove to largely corroborate contemporary estimates of the numbers of watermen employed and the considerable, if anticipated, presence of Scots migrants (46%), although these have an unexpected degree of long term residency. A discernible but unexplained shift in occupational profiles is also identified. Unfortunately the author's outcomes in these chapters are occasionally obscured by interpretive process.

Switching sources to the field of probate and inventory, he subsequently seeks to analyse the watermen's material resource: their watercraft. Keels and the likely synonymous 'coal boats' dominate. Their ownership structures exhibit clear variability, ranging from that of the lowly waterman's solitary capital resource to the severally accumulated rentier assets of successful shipwrights/shipbuilders. Discussion of contemporary Newcastle ship ownership less successfully extends these more original findings. Predicating that the port's non-coal commodity trades (in and out) also relied on the watermen's diverse transport services, the nature, extent and influence of this seaborne commerce is considered alongside that of coal. Much useful new information on the port's general traffic, *c.* 1690–1760, is thus exposed, although owing to the variability of primary source material (national and local) the non-coal outcomes are inevitably more indicative than quantitative. Oddly, the *Newcastle Courant*'s categorised Customs House-based lists of the late period, 1780–1800, are unconsidered.

However, every diligent researcher needs a share of serendipity and here the right mid-eighteenth century diary, an apprentice Hostman's, fell into the Wright hands at the right time, providing a closing chapter that inserts real life into the book's title — to say more would be a spoiler. Finally, there are slightly reiterative 'Conclusions'.

Soundly produced but costly, this book fits well into the publisher's constrained remit of limited-run titles aimed directly at academic libraries. Nevertheless, editorial input would have benefited from a specialist maritime reader, for instance, treat the 'Glossary' with caution.

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