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Archaeologies of Landscape: Excavating the Materialities of Hadrian's Wall

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the materiality of Hadrian's Wall beyond its widespread perception as a monument of/to Ancient Rome. Encounters with this monument have generated multitudinous materialities: hegemonic, conflicting and ambiguous. These trajectories have their own material circulations in both solid and narrative forms. Here, we consider materiality through the cultures inspired by/of the Wall. Through the formulation of an interdisciplinary methodology and praxis, we contribute to landscape studies generally and Romano-British frontier studies in particular. Firstly, we consider the genealogies of thought through which the Wall has been created, including its definition as a contested border and its use to inform discourses of nation and empire. Secondly, the material landscapes of the Wall are considered through phenomenon and encounter informed by contemporary debates in anthropology, archaeology and cultural geography. As part of the AHRC-funded *Tales of the Frontier* project (<http://www.dur.ac.uk/roman.centre/hadrianswall/>), we aim to provide an enriched account of the materialities of the Wall beyond traditional narratives generated by fieldwork and ancient historical texts.

Keywords: Hadrian's Wall, Roman archaeology, embodiment, heritage, materiality

Archaeologies of Landscape: Excavating the Materialities of Hadrian's Wall

Introduction

Recent studies of World Heritage Sites such as Stonehenge, Avebury and Newgrange have addressed the significance of these iconic ancient monuments as contested spaces (Bender 1998; Harvey 2003). In contrast, Hadrian's Wall (and the other Roman monuments of Britain) remains curiously apolitical. Blain and Wallis (2004: 1) define boundaries and frontiers as significant "spaces, both physical and intellectual, which are never neutrally positioned, but are assertive, contested and dialogic". Although some scholars have addressed the resonance of the Wall for past and contemporary societies (e.g. Barlow 2007; Ewin 2000; Griffiths 2003; Hingley 2006), there has been no sustained discussion of the significance of Hadrian's Wall as a contested landscape of great historical depth.

The study of Roman frontier is a highly specialized sub-discipline (James 2002; 2005: 501-2) which has claimed and created Hadrian's Wall as a primarily military monument. Although some scholars have sought to diversify the scope of research and to integrate frontier studies into wider academic discourse, study of the Wall retains a distinctive focus on issues of military planning and construction, warfare, soldiering and supply. This Roman military emphasis also dominates wider public appreciation of the Wall's political significance in past and present, well characterized in novels, tourist literature and re-enactment events [Figure 1].



Figure 1. 'Living Frontier' re-enactment event at Corbridge, Northumberland, June 2009 (Photo: R. Witcher)

In this paper we aim to draw out the political uses of the Wall through an analysis of its materiality. We consider how processes such as survey, excavation, illustration, conservation and World Heritage Site status have functioned, sub-consciously or otherwise, to define hegemonic interpretations. For example, the boundary of the national spaces of England and Scotland has, since the sixteenth century, been sanctioned in a variety of texts and representations through promotion of the Wall's monumentality and its genealogical associations (Griffiths 2003; Hingley 2008: 86-7).

Our analysis considers three forms of materiality: the archaeological remains of the Wall, the texts, images and artefacts which draw upon the Wall and, finally, the landscape in which the Wall is situated. Drawing upon these three materialities, we seek to contest the idea that both the meaning and structure of the Wall is 'set in stone'. We aim to destabilize the widespread popular and academic perception of the Wall as a purely Roman military monument in use from AD122 until the early fifth century. Whilst the vast majority of archaeological research has concentrated on these three centuries, we focus on the post-

Roman material history of the Wall which helps to reveal contested and multiple meanings. These disputed interpretations draw directly on the materialities of the Wall whilst fundamentally reshaping them. For example, nineteenth century conservation sought to display the Roman structures by clearing away later constructions such as medieval buildings, creating the monument we see today (Woodside & Crow 1999; see below); Victorian interpretations of the Wall's meanings therefore led to its material transformation. Similarly, analysis of textual materials demonstrates even the name applied to the Wall is culturally-loaded with expectations and assertions about its date, function and significance: 'Hadrian's Wall' is a recent consensus, but past names have included 'Picts Wall', 'Severus' Wall' and the 'Roman Wall', the latter still commonly used locally. This analytical approach also encourages us to reconsider the interpretation of the Wall during the Roman period itself, though this is not the focus of the present paper.

Our definition of materiality also includes the landscape of Hadrian's Wall. We seek to enrich the study of Roman landscapes through phenomenological methods that until now have been largely restricted to prehistoric monuments (e.g. Tilley 1994). Specifically, we investigate the Wall and its landscape as a place of embodied encounter in both past and present (Wylie 2002). Again we seek to identify the pluralities of experience which hegemonic discourse restricts (Foucault 1989) opening the way for the exploration of alternative embodied understandings of the Wall. In sum, we seek to unravel the ways in which Hadrian's Wall has been visualized, narrated, visited and researched in order to draw out its political values and to enrich and diversify its interpretation.

Materialities of the Wall and its landscape

A core motivation for this research is to challenge the restricted interpretation of the Wall's meaning within academic and especially popular culture. Specifically, we seek to question the implicit idea that the Wall was built for a specific purpose (e.g. defence) and that the Wall can be fully understood within such a narrow functional explanation. Moreover, with the end of Roman Britain in the early fifth century, the Wall's purpose and therefore its significance came to an end; hence, whilst the construction of the Wall and the subsequent 250 years of Roman occupation have been considered in great depth (e.g. Breeze 2006: 49-93; Breeze & Dobson 2000; Bidwell 2008), its post-Roman history has received far less but growing attention (e.g. Ewin 2000; Griffiths 2003; Shannon 2007; Woodside & Crow 1999).

The persistent and prevalent conceptualization of the Wall within military and functional terms draws upon – and in turn, shapes – the Wall's materialities. For example, popular and commercial photography of Hadrian's Wall has concentrated on the curtain wall and its dramatic positioning atop the Whin Sill crags of the central sector [Figure 2]. This both draws upon and reinforces the notion of a defensive boundary, articulated through monument, landscape and visual materials. The contemporary meaning of the Wall is constructed and mediated through its materialities. Drawing on cultural materialist and post-structuralist readings of the materiality, our research moves away from the idea

of an archaeological monument which has physically endured whilst perceptions, values, texts and images have evolved around it. Rather, we sketch the ways in which the monument and its setting have materially changed alongside socio-cultural valuations in a transformative and affective relationship.



Figure 2. Hadrian's Wall. Location and places mentioned in the text (Map: C. Unwin)

For much of its history, the fabric of the Wall has been spoliated, or used as a quarry for other structures and monuments. This de-construction has involved the rearrangement of the Wall's material components into nearby field walls, shielings, castles and churches (Whitworth 2000). These materials have also been transported to new locations, for example, stones and inscriptions were taken from the Roman site at Corbridge to build the crypt at Hexham Abbey during the seventh century (Eaton 2001: 111-27; Paul Bidwell *pers. comm*). Such reuse encompasses varied motives from the expedient recycling of building materials to the explicit appropriation of the cultural values associated with particular objects (Bell 2005; Greenhalgh 2008). This recontextualization of the Wall's materials destabilizes the notion of a static monument awaiting discovery; not only are meanings of the Wall mutable, but the Wall itself is physically mobile.

Further, the materiality of the Wall is not the sum total of its constituent stone building blocks. The landscape setting is an integral part of the monument and its meanings. Planning and heritage management authorities seek to control the physical appearance and values associated with this landscape, conserving its historical character. But just like the archaeological monument, the physical and conceptual setting of the Wall is far more diverse than its popular perception as wild and unspoilt suggests (Powe & Shaw 2003). For example, the physical landscape seen today around the Roman fort of Housesteads in the central sector of the Wall is largely the product of nineteenth century land improvement (e.g. field boundaries, drainage); this 'timeless' landscape (Richards & Clegg

2008; Woodside and Crow 1999) is less than 150 years old and certainly not 'Roman'. In fact, perceptions of this landscape have radically changed over time: William Camden was unable to visit Housesteads in 1599 due to the threat from the notorious Busy Gap Rogues (Birley 1961: 179; Crow 2007). In contrast, visitor numbers between 2002 and 2007 averaged 108,000 per annum (National Trail 2008). In 400 years, this landscape has been transformed from dangerous and socially marginal into the most visited and photographed part of the Northumberland National Park. At the same time, perceptions of the very shape and significance of the physical landscape have been transformed. As the Housesteads area has become physically and conceptually accessible through railways, roads and guidebooks, perceptions of its topography have softened from 'mountainous' to 'hilly' (compare Bruce 1851: 46 and Hodgson 1858: 44 with Dillon 2008: 174). These words carry significant baggage in terms of social and cultural perceptions of security, civility and barbarism. Our material approach therefore seeks not only to decentre hegemonic discourses of Wall, but also to destabilize our assumptions about its very material form and location.

Historical materialities of the Wall

In this section we consider a series of historical vignettes which illustrate the evolving materialities of Hadrian's Wall and the way in which they have inspired and been shaped by contemporary cultural and political ideas. This genealogical approach to the Wall underscores the valency of its meaning and therefore the culturally-constructed nature of current hegemonic discourses.

The northern frontiers of Roman Britain formed an early focus of interest for antiquarians (Birley 1961: 1-24; Hingley 2008; Todd 2004). Successive editions of Camden's *Britannia* report a growing number of Roman inscriptions collected by individuals such as John Senhouse during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. These objects served to connect localities and collectors in a frontier landscape to a wider classical past (Hepple 2003: 170; Hingley 2008: 38-40). In this sense, the recovery and display of inscribed stones continues the process of spoliation, mobilizing the Wall both physically and conceptually, for contemporary social and political purposes

Alongside this fascination for portable objects and materials deriving from the Wall, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was growing interest in the monument as a whole, and specifically its perceived location in the boundary zone between England and Scotland (Hingley 2008: 11). The presence of the Wall created difficulties for James I's project of political union (Griffiths 2003), but provided a useful model for the Hanoverian surveying and colonization of Highland Scotland (Hingley 2006: 338-41). The Wall has provided rich materials for various contemporary political discourses about national identities – both their assertion and their critique.

In such contexts, an increasing focus on the structure and location of the Wall can be traced in both antiquarian mapping and early excavation (Birley 1961; Hingley 2008: 85-156). Both practices demonstrate the tensions created by attempting to fix the mobility of meanings and materials. An early practice was to

associate and map specific sites with names drawn from the written sources such as the *Notitia Dignitatum* (a late Roman document listing army units and their stations) and the Rudge Cup (one of a number of small Roman vessels listing forts on the Wall). However, attempts to identify and locate ancient places on the ground led to new forms of mobility as names ‘migrated’ between sites in the light of new archaeological discoveries (e.g. (C)Amboglanna has been identified with both Birdoswald and Castlesteads; Breeze 2006: 34-9; Rivet & Smith 1979). In contrast, decades of convention have led to certainty of name attribution and form which may not be supported by the evidence. For example, the Roman town/station of Corbridge is widely-known as Corstopitum on the basis of the Antonine Itinerary (a Roman ‘road map’ listing places and distances between them), but the site’s name also appears in different forms in other ancient documents: Corielopocarium (the Ravenna Cosmography, a late Roman list of placenames) and Coria/Coris (the Vindolanda writing tablets). In this example, brown heritage road signs also serve to fossilize ‘Corstopitum’ as *the* official name. Hence, though scholars have attempted to stabilize knowledge of the Wall, there are tensions within the Wall’s materialities about the certainty of interpretations.

Similarly, the fieldwork of antiquarians and archaeologists has effectively sought to fix meanings of the Wall by physically digging into and rearranging the monument’s material form. For example, nineteenth century excavations dug into the remains of many of the Roman forts along the Wall (Ewin 2000). Not only was post-Roman evidence destroyed in order to reach the Roman levels buried beneath, but even some Roman structural features were selectively removed, for example, reopening fort gateways which had been blocked very shortly after they were originally constructed (e.g. the second century blocking of the east portal of the south gate at Birdoswald was removed during the 1851 excavations, Breeze 2006: 300). Such excavations valorized not simply the Roman phases of occupation at these sites by cutting through and destroying post-Roman stratigraphy, but sought specifically to discover and understand the earliest and original phases. This highly selective process created a synchronic landscape; long complex histories of occupation were tidied and made to connect with a single moment in time (i.e. the Hadrianic construction period, c.AD122-130). Subsequent material histories were literally wiped away, restoring what was deemed to be authentic form and meaning. As a result of this simplification of the archaeological monument (e.g. Clayton’s work to display the Hadrianic phases of the fort at Chesters, Breeze 2006: 195-209), the post-Hadrianic history of the Wall was, and continues to be, marginalized. Even the extensive evidence for rebuilding of the Wall during the Roman period, for example Severus’ restoration work in the early third century, is sidelined in the dominant popular and academic narratives.

This attention to the earliest structures underlines the fact that excavators do not simply reveal the past, but actively construct it by prioritizing material traces (Shanks 1992); in effect, constructing ‘(neo-)Roman-ness’. The work of John Clayton is a case in point. From the 1830s, Clayton bought properties along the line of the Wall to protect the monument from destruction and to display it publicly

(Woodside & Crow 1999). His works included dismantling post-Roman structures (e.g. the farmhouse at Housesteads) restoring an 'authentic' Roman monument. He also exposed stretches of the Wall, reassembling collapsed stone blocks back into a structural form. The resulting Wall (known archaeologically as the 'Consolidated Wall' or 'Clayton's Wall') has become synonymous with Hadrian's Wall, in much the same way that twentieth century 'restoration' of the Great Wall of China has become the definitive Chinese Wall (Waldron 1992).

Clayton's work is frequently perceived as the emergence of the practice of conservation (Crow 2004: 131); from a materials perspective, these interventions are part of an ongoing dialogue which draws cultural values from the Wall, extending from the crypt at Hexham to contemporary reconstructions at Wallsend, South Shields and Vindolanda [FIGURE 3]. Such (re)constructions stress an inherent tension between the physical monumentality of the Wall and the mobility of its components and meanings. Consolidation and reconstruction serve to fix the form and perception of the Wall, asserting legitimacy through their sheer stony presence – interpretations are literally 'set in stone'. But through their proliferation, these reconstructions also generate new and competing visions which erode the notion of a single authentic Roman Wall. Matters of scholarly dispute, such as whether or not the Wall was topped with crenellations, are literally played out in solid form through these competing monuments.



Figure 3. Hadrian's Wall at Wallsend, North Tyneside. A reconstructed section of Hadrian's Wall (left) is located directly next to the exposed foundations of the Roman Wall (right) (Photo: R. Witcher)

In comparison with many of the Greek and Roman monuments of the Mediterranean, such as the Colosseum, Hadrian's Wall is notoriously *insignificant* in terms of the canon of classical literature – it is mentioned only once or twice in the surviving sources. Nonetheless, the material recovered by excavation has been repeatedly located and interpreted in terms of text-based histories, in particular, it is used to 'materialize' specific historical events (generally, Porter 2003). This is well-illustrated by nineteenth and early twentieth century attempts to relate phases of burning and destruction at many of the forts to hostile incursions from north of the Wall, thus demonstrating the historical veracity of, for example, the 'Barbarian Conspiracy of 367' (Amm. Marc. 27.8.1-28.3.9). As Breeze (2005: 40) emphasizes, such readings of textual and archaeological evidence are intimately connected with (often implicit) assumptions about the function of the Wall informed by contemporary values. Within the context of broader societal attitudes towards frontiers as defensive and exclusive, scholars have prioritized scarce and unrepresentative historical sources and used the very materiality of the Wall to make them tangible. Even the scholarly language used to describe the Wall is culturally-loaded and informs

wider interpretation. For example, the now universal category of 'fort' engenders particular expectations of military occupation and masculinity, especially when compared to earlier terms such as 'station' or 'city' as used by antiquarians such as Camden.

The value of the Wall as a material connection to Mediterranean civilization has also evolved. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the limited textual materials relating to the Wall – and its location on the edge of empire – defined the study of Hadrian's Wall as peripheral to mainstream classical scholarship which focused on Italy and Greece (Dyson 2006; Scott 2003). At the same time, the classical origin of the monument was linked together with its physical location at the north-western periphery of the Roman Empire. In cultural terms, Hadrian's Wall, when compared to Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli or the Pantheon in Rome, was not a high-status example of classical architecture, but this did not prevent its use in discourses about nation and empire. The physical visibility of this grand genealogical and imperial monument at the edge of English national space led to its use as a metaphor for the boundaries of English identity and for the wider political frontier of British imperial space (Hingley 2000; 2008). At the same time, interest in the British landscape fluctuated with continental politics which prevented physical access to the Mediterranean; exclusion from the Greco-Roman core refocused attention on the classical world 'at home' (e.g. Bruce during 1848; Birley 1961: 26). The secondary status of British archaeology can be traced within academic circles well into the twentieth century; the Wall remained 'a training ground' (Freeman 2007) for the proper work of classical archaeologists in the Mediterranean. However, the sheer physical monumentality and presence of the Wall (and the paradoxical *lack* of texts) demanded the attention of antiquarians and archaeologists. Hence, despite its inferior status, the study of the northern frontiers was at the forefront of the development of archaeological method in Britain including innovative hypothesis-driven approaches of a sort inconceivable in the contemporary archaeology of classical Italy or Greece. For example, by the late nineteenth century, the rapid accumulation of material evidence could no longer be contained within a straightforward structural account based on the assumption of an architect's (Hadrian's?) 'blueprint'. A more complex building sequence was hypothesized and verified by targeted excavations which successfully located earlier structural sequences beneath the forts demonstrating a series of changes during the construction of the Wall (Couse 1990). Thus, the materiality of the Wall is mutable, but not mute; its materials and meanings can be reworked and mobilized, but are not infinite (Tilley 2004: 219).

Contemporary materialities

Further attempts to stabilize and define the materials and meanings of the Wall can be documented through the proliferation of legal and statutory designation during the twentieth century. These extend from some of the earliest attempts by the State to list ('schedule') ancient monuments through to its current World Heritage Site status (Mason *et al.* 2003).

The aim of these statutory designations is to protect the fabric and setting of the

Wall from damage or disturbance. 'Scheduling' (under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, but originating in 1882) identifies monuments of 'national importance' to be given particular legal protection by the State. The criteria are broad (e.g. 'potential to contribute to information, understanding and appreciation', AMAAA 1979) and serve to institutionalize the close association between ancient monuments and national identity for political purposes. Monumental sites such as Stonehenge, Avebury and Hadrian's Wall constitute productive foci of political discourses and moral geographies (Bender 1998; Ewin 2000; Harvey 2003); legal designation defines, appropriates and sustains the cultural and political values of these monuments through their creation as national heritage. But as noted in the introduction, whilst monuments such as Stonehenge are widely understood as powerful and contested in these terms, Hadrian's Wall generally is not.

More recently, World Heritage Site status has attempted to redefine these *national* values as *universal* values. In 1987 Hadrian's Wall was inscribed on the list of internationally-significant monuments under UNESCO cultural criteria ii, iii & iv (ICOMOS 1987) citing the Wall as an "outstanding example of a fortified *limes* [or Roman frontier]." The inscription continues "No other ensemble from the Roman Empire illustrates as ambitious and coherent a system of defensive constructions perfected by engineers over the course of several generations... [T]his cultural property is an exceptional reference whose universal value leaves no doubt". In 2005, the WHS inscription was extended as the transnational 'Frontiers of the Roman Empire' to incorporate sections of the Roman frontier in Germany (WHC 2005; Breeze and Jilek 2008). However, boundaries and frontiers are by their nature divisive (Blain & Wallis 2004) and their promotion in terms of universal heritage is consequently problematic (Creighton 2007; generally, Labadi 2007). As heritage, these monuments must be distanced and de-problematized before they can become shared universally (Fowler 1992).

A new stage in the Wall's material history was reached in 2003, when the Hadrian's Wall National Trail was opened providing a fully way-marked path along the entire length of the Wall; in 2006, the Hadrian's Way cyclepath (NCR72) was also established. These new routes have had a profound impact on the materialities of the Wall. Visitor numbers have increased significantly leading to management concerns about erosion of the Wall's fragile fabric (BBC 2005; Newman 2008); but more prominent is the new and rich attendant material cultures generated and their influence on the landscape and interpretation of the Wall. A proliferation of signposts to guide visitors serves to 'brand' the Wall, creating a new and tangible sense of unity and sanctioning the appropriate way to experience it. [FIGURE 4] This street furniture also (re)materializes the monument in areas where urban development and agricultural improvement have diminished or destroyed its physical presence. This process is particularly apparent on Tyneside. Apart from faint echoes in the alignment of streets, the Wall has long disappeared beneath medieval and modern settlement. However, there is a history of rematerializing the Wall within the urban fabric. The large-scale redevelopment of Newcastle during the nineteenth century revealed tantalizing traces of the city's Roman forbear (*Pons Aelius*). As well as the

collection of inscribed stones, the Roman past was rematerialized through commemoration, for example, a plaque on Neville Hall draws attention to paving which marks the line of the Wall. [FIGURE 5] The Neoclassical redevelopment of Newcastle by Dobson and Grainger can be located within a wider mid-nineteenth century trend which found inspiration in the Greek and Roman world generally, but it may also have drawn on the emerging traces of the city's own Classical past (Wilkes & Dobbs 1964).



Figure 4. Hadrian's Wall street furniture. Sign post on the Hadrian's Wall National Trail at Newburn, Newcastle upon Tyne (Photo: R. Witcher)



Figure 5. Commemorative plaque on Neville Hall, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne. (Photo: R. Witcher)

Such rematerialization continues today. Public art such as the *Newcastle through the Ages* (by Henry and Joyce Collins, 1974) draws on the city's Roman past to create a narrative of famous men, commerce and, particularly, engineering (Usherwood *et al.* 2000: 125-6) and signs at Wallsend Metro station inform and advise commuters in Latin as well as English. These materialities presence the Roman past in a landscape devoid of extant monumental traces and assert connections between local and Roman achievement and shared moral aspirations.

Another rich material culture which has proliferated in recent years is the Hadrian 'brand'. Businesses, public agencies and individual buildings have drawn upon the name to project their local (specifically North-eastern) identity. Healthcare provision, air-conditioning installation, bottled water and industrial estates amongst many other examples all promote their business through the 'Hadrian' brand. This emperor's name has become metonymic for the Wall and the region. It is a shorthand way to associate goods and services with the monument (enduring, solid and reliable) and hence to the suggestion of local and regional provenance. So rich are these recent material cultures that Barlow (2007) suggests that the North-east has turned its attention from its industrial past to its earlier Roman heritage as a more positive and inclusive source of inspiration for regional identity, citizenship and heritage.

In the 2000s, the diverse geographical origins of the Roman soldiers represented on the Wall has been used to create a more inclusive role for the Wall than that represented in late nineteenth and twentieth century texts and images, which often view it as a Roman military monument or as an English or imperial structure that dominated and excluded the uninvited and unassimilated (Hingley 2000). The more inclusive perception has come to prominence through a popular emphasis on wider access to the monument and a focus upon the varied constituencies that built and occupied the Wall. This open agenda fits the focus

of various agencies in the encouragement of visitors to the Wall from the urban centres of northern England and also from abroad (Newman 2008: 29).

Another manifestation of this broadening of access is the art project *Writing on the Wall* (Chettle 2006). This project re-imagines the Wall as a multinational monument. The introduction to the published volume emphasizes that the Wall has a special role as a place “where people of all kinds, often drawn from remote places – the Roman army itself recruited as far afield as north Africa, Romania and Turkey – have wandered, fought, loved and worked during the two thousand years” (O’Brien 2006: 10). In the same volume, Margaret Lewis summarizes *Writing on the Wall* by remarking that the project was formed by a group of British writers together with an international group drawn from the countries which provided the garrisons for the Wall. It included poets from Morocco, Romania, Iraq, the Netherlands and Bulgaria (Lewis 2006: 16). The individual artists reflected their own history in a multitude of ways by writing of contemporary concerns in addressing the Wall. Some found it easy to imagine life among the settlements, “especially the life of women and ordinary soldiers” (*ibid*). Asking, “So who does own the Stones?”, Lewis answers by stating “Every writer, every artist, every musician, every visitor who has stopped to wonder and to respond to this World Heritage site. This heritage is for us all” (*ibid*). These works develop ideas drawn from the varied populations represented in Roman times on the Wall, refocusing inherited ideas of Hadrian’s Wall as military and political boundary.

Some of the items published through the *Writing of the Wall* initiative, however, cast a reflective gaze on issues of colonization. For example, Samuel Shimon, an Iraqi writer who now lives in London, considered his experience while visiting the mouth of the Tyne:

I was eating fish and chips and hearing a voice telling me: ‘Your Ancestors were working here. They were ferrymen from the Tigris’. I was nodding my head and saying, yes, my ancestors were slaves here. Slaves under the same sky’ (Shimon 2006, 77).

The Tigris boatmen were not, in reality, slaves in Roman terms, but auxiliary soldiers. The way that we consider these people, however, is at least partly a reflection of the dominant perspective from the writing of the Roman Empire, which views imperial assimilation, Romanization or ‘becoming Roman’, in a directly positive fashion (van Driel Murray 2002; Hingley in press; Mattingly 2006). Roman auxiliary soldiers may have been recruited in ways that exploited their own cultural qualities, but they were also marginalized through the creation of an imperial system of order which worked to the benefits of certain dominant players (Hingley in press).

Archaeologists are involved in this realignment of interests through new scholarship on gender, ethnic identity, community and non-military lifeways (Allason-Jones 2001a; 2001b; Bowman 1998; Derks & Roymans 2002; van-Driel Murray 2002; Hingley 2004; James 2001; Symonds & Mason 2009). In these terms, popular appreciations and academic research illustrate the transformation

of common interests.

Material Cultures of Embodiment

This section turns to embodied encounters of Hadrian's Wall and its landscape. In response to the scholarly emphasis on representation, the recent 'material turn' in the social sciences has looked to embodiment and phenomenology as both philosophy and methodology. Here we consider the relationship between representation and experience through the material cultures of the Wall, specifically photographic practices and on-site performance. We explore the ways in which Hadrian's Wall and its landscape have been experienced both historically and today. This study is therefore located at a critical point between archaeology and geography; how can we access past experiences and how can we understand the historical depth affecting contemporary encounters?

From an early date, a small number of visual representations of the Wall and its landscape have assumed iconic status. These 'pioneer images' establish a visual model which serves to commodify monuments and landscapes (Balm & Holcomb 2003: 159). Once established, motifs endure through different media, creating sanctioned ways of viewing. In particular, these views can be located within the Romantic tradition. Representation of the Wall, particularly in the central sector was manipulated to engender the sublime (Ewin 2000; FIGURE 6). Most obviously these views dramatize the Whin Sill crags, excluding the flatter surrounding topography especially to the north. Similarly, the divide between cultural and natural is dissolved; the Wall merges into the natural landscape, literally growing out of the crags. The repetition of these images helps to underwrite specific notions concerning the function and values of the Wall (e.g. defence, civilization vs. barbarity).

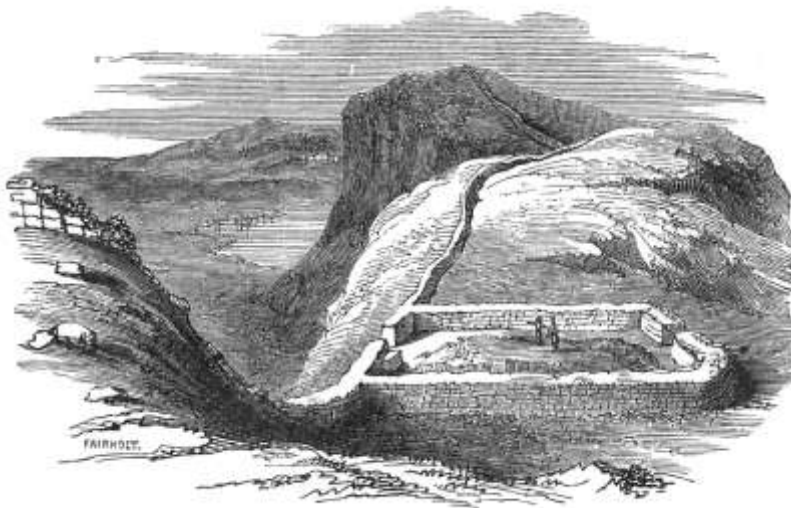


Figure 6. Woodcut of Castle Nick (Milecastle 39) and Hadrian's Wall on the Whin Sill (from Bruce 1895: 174).

More widely, the circulation of such images is intimately associated with tourism, from the Grand Tour to the present. Once established, these images continue to

circulate because they structure and fulfil expectations, constituting a metric by which experience is judged (Balm & Holcomb 2003: 170; Caton & Santos 2008: 11). When visiting sites, tourists may even reproduce these views in their own photographic practices, 'closing the hermeneutic circle' (*ibid.*). Consideration of the historical production and circulation of images and the history of visiting suggests that these issues are closely inter-related; John Collingwood Bruce commissioned the artist Thomas Richardson to produce watercolours to illustrate his talks about the Wall to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle and he took Richardson's two sons, also artists, along the Wall to produce images for his *Handbook to the Roman Wall* (Breeze 2003: 3). Bruce's stated intention was to produce visual proof of the Wall's monumentality, lest his oral reports were not believed (Birley 1961: 26). The study of embodied encounter must therefore acknowledge that the circulation of images may 'script' ways of seeing and being in the landscape.

Tilley (2004) has asserted that recent approaches to landscape are primarily 'paper'; too much attention has focused on representation rather than experience. The social sciences have sought to redress this situation by focusing on embodiment. The impact of Tilley's (1994) own contribution has been swift and profound. Landscapes and monuments are experienced bodily (Edensor 2005). Phenomenological studies of past peoples' experiences have focused heavily on prehistoric societies, particularly the monumental landscapes of the British Neolithic; there have been few studies concerning Roman landscapes (for an early example, Witcher 1998) and none of Hadrian's Wall. Nonetheless, the perceived military function of Hadrian's Wall has generated many studies which indirectly focus on the senses and bodily experience. Most obviously, there has been much attention to the visibility afforded from atop the Wall and to the way in which the military architecture controlled movement (e.g. Woolliscroft 2001). In many respects these studies mimic the explicitly phenomenological studies of prehistory, but derive from the military interests of Roman frontier studies (generally, see James 2002).

Phenomenological approaches have helped to critique Cartesian assumptions. However, the work of Tilley and others has in turn been critiqued on a range of levels. From an historical perspective, the assumption that modern bodies, emotions and sensibilities can be used to access past experiences has been questioned (Brück 2005). In particular, Tilley (1994) has made explicit claims for the use of empathy to access past experiences. Such phenomenological approaches may indirectly reinforce Enlightenment concepts such as the individual, whilst failing to address the culturally contingent construction of senses and emotions. As human beings we cannot step outside our cultures in order to experience the world 'as it really is'. Perception is interpretation; senses and emotions are culturally defined (Ingold 2000). A phenomenology of Hadrian's Wall can therefore never present a uniform experience of place in either the present or past. However, the idea that contemporary bodies can access past experience is arguably the basis of approaches to the Wall which emphasize surveillance and control of movement; through a familiarity with the landscape and empathy with the (military) people in it, Roman archaeologists have claimed

to understand the function, use and impact of the monument.

It is not only archaeologists who empathize with past peoples' experiences. One of the most widely read and heard observations about the Wall concerns visitors' empathy with the soldier stuck in a cold climate and bleak landscape on the edge of the empire. Such contemporary encounters are another avenue for phenomenological enquiry. The monument attracts huge numbers of visitors, continuing a long practice of visiting and, specifically, 'walking' the Wall (i.e. from end-to-end). Hutton (1990) is often said to have been the first person to walk the length of the Wall in 1801 and Bruce instigated a decennial 'pilgrimage' along the Wall in 1849 (Nesbitt & Tolia-Kelly 2009). In walking along the central sector of the Wall today, most visitors' physical experience is elided with that of the Roman soldier; visitors' re-garrison the Wall, hold the strategic high ground and command the view to the north. Few visitors cross the Wall to walk in *Barbaricum* beyond. Contemporary visiting practices may therefore produce a very specific experience and interpretation of the Wall (Witcher in preparation).

Above, specific visual representations of the Wall were situated in the context of Romanticism. However, this movement also attached importance to walking and experience; these were landscapes to be visually consumed *and* physically experienced (Johnson 2006). In the context of early tourism, visual representations strongly shaped perceptions of destinations; similarly, guidebooks directed embodied encounters. Bruce's *Handbook to the Roman Wall* (first published in 1851) stimulated and catered for growing demand for physical and intellectual access to historical and geographical knowledge in the context of nineteenth century imperialist notions of science and improvement which mapped, measured, and ordered the world (Said 1978). The current abundance of guides for the National Trail and travelogues of walkers' experiences amply document this continuing tradition. Each of these texts and images defines a way of appreciating and understanding the history and meaning of the Wall and, specifically, the appropriate bodily encounter with implications for geometries of power (Massey 2006; Tolia-Kelly 2006).

The material cultures of tourism (brochures, guidebooks, signposts, etc.) are critical for a study of embodied experience of the Wall. In the contemporary world, landscapes are rarely experienced independently of visual material cultures, especially heritage sites such as Hadrian's Wall. An investigation of embodied encounters therefore demands attention to cultural context and representation.

Tourist material cultures teach visitors how to 'be' in the landscape – what to value and therefore what to disregard; how to move and perceive. For example, guidebooks routinely describe (and hence *prescribe*) movement from east to west. However, prevailing winds and the impracticalities of containing such an arrangement within a conventional book format recommend walking from west to east. Nonetheless, guidebooks maintain the conventional archaeological numbering system starting at Wallsend. The National Trail has generated significant new material cultures which script visitor movement, disciplining behaviour and codifying experience. There is also a tension between the ways in

which these routes each sanction a single authentic linear experience of *the* Wall whilst simultaneously creating multiple alternative ways of encountering the monument. The National Trail and Hadrian's Cycleway prescribe specific routes, sometimes coterminous with the Wall, sometimes diverging especially in urban areas. The proliferation of these routes both prescribes experience and diversifies possible encounters at the same time. Just as the Wall's materials may be disassembled and moved around, so the line of the Wall itself may shift and multiply.

For a phenomenological study of embodied encounters of the Wall, it is important to draw on the range of scholarly studies which have systematically diminished analytical categories. For example, tourist studies have blurred the distinction between tourist and host/local (preferring 'visitor' to encompass both); archaeological phenomenologies have eroded the difference between contemporary and past experiences (Brück 2005) and questioned the role of specialists as guardians of knowledge (Stout 2008). Analysis of embodied practices on the Wall therefore sits at a critical point between the experiences of bodies past and present, lay and specialist; it draws together studies of tourist behaviours with the ethnography of archaeological practice. Performance recasts visitors as active makers of meaning in and of the landscape (Shanks & Pearson 2001).

As well as 'being' in this landscape, visitors also create images of it; analysis of these materials demonstrates the way in which these images both respond to and create meaning and value through subject, framing and lighting. In order to understand contemporary visitor photography on the Wall, it is necessary to locate these images in the context of a genealogy of visual representation, especially those circulating in tourist literature. Studies have explored the degree to which visitors 'close the hermeneutic circle' through their own photographic practices or whether this wrongly casts visitors as helpless victims of scripted behaviour (Edensor 2001; 2004: 198). The existence of iconic images and cultural currencies does not mean that visitors cannot decode and bypass such themed space, especially when confronted by the gaps between representation and encounter. To return to the sublime image of the Wall snaking over undulating crags, the power of this image draws on the exaggerated vertical topography, crowned and enhanced by the Wall. However, following the Trail along these crags, it is the flat expanses and distant horizons which capture the eye. Hence the horizontal visual plane is juxtaposed to the physical exertion of steep vertical ascent and descent; this embodied gaze helps to reveal the cultural construction of visual genres such as the sublime.

Conclusions

In this paper we have engaged with the materialities of Hadrian's Wall through an approach that explores phenomenology and the genealogy of knowledge. In contrast to dominant academic traditions and popular perceptions, we have deliberately sought to destabilize the field of enquiry to enable more fluid and plural accounts of the meaning and value of the frontier. Of course, our own accounts are also partial; bounded through disciplinary training and Eurocentric

notions of frontier and landscape, but this paper offers an opening towards a more dialogic account of the Wall's materiality. In sum, we hope to have presented a different form of 'excavation' in our material approach to the contestable monuments of Roman Britain.

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