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CONTEXTUALIZING HADRIAN'S WALL: THE WALL AS 'DEBATABLE LANDS'

By

RICHARD HINGLEY AND RICH HARTIS

1. Introduction

This paper emphasizes the symbolic monumentality of Hadrian's Wall, exploring the idea that it was a porous and contested frontier.¹ There has been a recent outpouring of archaeological and management publications on Hadrian's Wall,² which provide substantial new knowledge and improve our understanding of the structure. In light of the state-of-play with Wall studies today, our motivation here is twofold. Firstly, we aim to encourage the opening up research on Hadrian's Wall to a broader series of questions deriving from studies of frontiers and borders in other cultural contexts.³ There are many new approaches to contemporary and historic borderlands and frontiers, stemming from geography, history, cultural studies and English literature, and we wish to promote a broad comparative approach to Roman frontiers that draws upon this wider frontier-research.⁴ Secondly, our approach draws upon recent writings that formulate new

¹ R. Hingley, 'Tales of the Frontier: diasporas on Hadrian's Wall', in H. Eckardt (ed.) *Roman Diasporas*. Portsmouth, Rhode Island, Journal of Roman Archaeology (forthcoming).

² For examples, P. Bidwell, *Understanding Hadrian's Wall* (Kendal 2008); D. Breeze, *J. Collingwood Bruce's Handbook to the Roman Wall, Fourteenth edition* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2006); A. Rushworth, *Housesteads Roman Fort - The Grandest Station* (London, 2009); M.F.A. Symonds and D.J.P. Mason, *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall* (Durham, 2009).

³ See S. James, 'Limsefreunde in Philadelphia: a snapshot of the state of Roman Frontier Studies', *Britannia* 36 (2005), 499-502 and R. Hingley, 'Hadrian's Wall in Theory: Pursuing new agendas?' In P. Bidwell, *Understanding Hadrian's Wall* (Kendal, 2008), 25-8.

⁴ C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A social and economic study* (London, 1997), 1-9.

approaches to Roman identities and social change,⁵ exploring the significance of these works to the interpretation of the building and peopling of Hadrian's Wall.

To open up research, this paper argues that studies of Hadrian's Wall can turn their focus onto the dialogic, transformative and contested nature of the structures that define the Roman frontier-zone.⁶ By drawing cross-cultural comparisons here, we are not trying here to claim a cross-cultural, cross-temporal logic for the creation of all frontier works and zones, but we are aiming to view Roman frontiers from a broader perspective in order to open new lines of enquiry and, hopefully, to stimulate new research.⁷ Some accounts of ancient monuments explore the idea of contested landscapes to address contemporary contexts—a well-explored example in Britain is Barbara Bender's assessment of Stonehenge and contemporary Druids.⁸ Elsewhere, the contested nature of Hadrian's Wall is beginning to be addressed in 'art' and scholarship.⁹ To pursue this aim, we draw upon recent writings that focus upon Roman imperial identity in an attempt to address the symbolic context and initial purposes of the Wall. The paper aims to build upon the functional explanations that have dominated much discussion, including

⁵ Including: E. Dench, *Romulus' Asylum* (Oxford, 2005); R. Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire* (London, 2005); M. Millett, *The Romanization of Britain* (Cambridge, 1990); G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The origins of provincial society in Gaul* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁶ R. Witcher, D.P. Tolia-Kelly and R. Hingley, 'Archaeologies of Landscape: Excavating the materialities of Hadrian's Wall', *Journal of Material Culture* 15(1) (2010), 105-28.

⁷ Hingley 2008, op. cit. (n. 3).

⁸ B. Bender, 'Stonehenge - Contested Landscapes (Medieval to Present-Day)', in B. Bender, *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*. (Oxford, 1993), 245-80.

⁹ R. Hingley "'The Most Ancient Boundary between England and Scotland": Genealogies of the Roman Walls', *Classical Reception Journal*, 2 (1) (2010), 25-43; S. Shimon, 'Kika and the Ferryman', in S. Chettle, *Writing on the Wall: An International writing project for Hadrian's Wall 2001-2006* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2006), 77-80; D. P. Tolia-Kelly and C. Nesbitt, *The Archaeology of 'race': Exploring the northern frontier in Roman Britain* (Durham University, 2009).

concepts of the Wall having provided a fighting platform or line,¹⁰ a system of military domination for a resistant landscape,¹¹ or that it was primarily an impediment to movement with a 'customs' function.¹² These explanations all have relevance to interpreting the Wall's reception, purpose and function, but it is not primarily upon these readings that we wish to dwell.

2. Describing the imperial frontier

A significant issue for many Roman antiquaries and archaeologists since the late sixteenth century has been the documentation of evidence for the Wall.¹³ Antiquaries, from the late sixteenth century, visited its remains, collected artefacts and surveyed and mapped its physical remains; from the mid nineteenth century, excavations have built up knowledge of chronology and sequence. This building of knowledge has provided a very important contribution to our understanding of the province of *Britannia* and of the northern frontier of the Roman empire.¹⁴ Most of the authoritative archaeological accounts of the monument and its landscape that have arisen in the past 100 years aim at

¹⁰ J. C. Bruce, *The Roman Wall: A Historical, Topographical and Descriptive account of the Barrier of the Lower Isthmus, extending from the Tyne to the Solway* (London, 1851); G. H. Donaldson, 'Thoughts on a Military Appreciation of the Design of Hadrian's Wall', *Archaeologia Aeliana*⁵ XVI (1988), 125-37; H. F. Pelham, *Essays on Roman History* (Oxford, 1911); I. A. Richmond, I.A., *J. Collingwood Bruce's Handbook to the Roman Wall, Tenth edition* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1947).

¹¹ J. C. Mann, 'The Frontiers of the Principate', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.1 (1974), 508-33.

¹² For impediment to movement, see E. Birley, 'Hadrianic Frontier Policy' in Swoboda, E. (ed.) *Carnuntina: Vorträge beim internationaler Kongress der Alturtumsforscher Carnuntum 1955, Römische Forschungen in Niederösterreich* (Graz-Köln, 1956), 25-33. For the idea of the customs barrier, see D. Breeze, 'To Study the Monument: Hadrian's Wall 1848-2006', in P. Bidwell (ed.) *Understanding Hadrian's Wall* (Kendal, 2008), 1-4; R. G. Collingwood, 'The Purpose of Hadrian's Wall', *Vasculum* VIII (1921), 4-9.

¹³ E. Birley, *Research on Hadrian's Wall* (Kendal, 1961); A. Ewin, *Hadrian's Wall: A Social and Cultural History* (Lancaster, 2000); R. Hingley, *The Recovery of Roman Britain 1586-1906: 'A Colony so Fertile'* (Oxford, 2008), 85-139.

¹⁴ D. Breeze and B. Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall* (London, 2000).

a comprehensive and complete knowledge and understanding of the construction, sequence and form of Hadrian's Wall. Archaeologists have provided detailed reconstructions of the Roman credentials of Hadrian's Wall and their accounts focus attention on its Roman chronology, architectural form, sequence, together with gaps in our knowledge that we can surely fill with further research. For example, the recent *Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall* explores 'what we know; what we don't know; what we'd like to know, and, finally, the most effective means of acquiring the knowledge we seek'.¹⁵ In this search for complete and comprehensive knowledge, it is the gaps in information that we can fill that are worth addressing and more esoteric forms of understanding tend to be sidelined or downplayed in a search for consensus. The *Research Framework* is a very important and highly useful document which provides an impressive summary of a wealth of available information that has been derived from centuries of research. But it also represents an approach that emphasizes the security, dependability and the cumulative nature of knowledge and understanding. It is based on a philosophy that suggests that filling the gaps in information will, inherently, lead to better understanding, resulting in high-quality interpretation, management and conservation. But can we really understand the Wall through amassing an ever-increasing quantity of detail? We also have to re-contextualize this knowledge through an assessment of the broader significance of the frontier and to accept the fundamental transformative nature of knowledge as a contested field of understanding.

3. Debating the imperial frontier

In a study of the archaeology of sacred sites, J. Blain and R. Wallis remark that boundaries and frontiers have particular significance as 'spaces, both physical and intellectual, which are never neutrally positioned, but are assertive, contested and dialogic'.¹⁶ A literary approach to addressing the borderland as containing multiple

¹⁵ Symonds and Mason 2009, op. cit. (n. 2), ix

¹⁶ J. Blain and R. J. Wallis, 'Sacred Sites, Contested Rites/Rights', *Journal of Material Culture* 9 (2004), 237-61. See also J. Juffer, 'Introduction', in J. Juffer *The Last Frontier: The Contemporary Configuration of the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Durham, 2006), 663-80; L. Russell,

alternative histories, or the illumination of the diverse cultures of the border region,¹⁷ promises new perspectives on a range of frontier zones including the Roman works in Britain.¹⁸ Frontier zones, as places in which people come into contact, create new transformational identities across the debatable lands that they incorporate.¹⁹ There is a wealth of published research that addresses borders and frontiers in the modern age and we cannot aim to draw on this research in detail here, but it is worth exploring the nature of current research on the Roman frontier with these cross-cultural parallels in mind.

We draw upon contemporary ideas about border zones as ‘debatable lands’ in order to define a new reading for the Wall, proposing that it is a monumental physical boundary that expresses a wish to refocus a conception of Roman identity near the porous edge of Roman imperial space. This process can be paralleled with the role of city walls as a signifier of civic identity; importantly for Hadrian’s Wall, this focal point lay at the perimeter of a city-space and not at its core.²⁰ In a discussion of modern frontiers and borders, Claire Lamont and Michael Rossington observe that ‘debatable lands’ occur when a border in the modern world is, ‘for whatever reason, “indistinct” and probably also “porous”’.²¹ This concept is derived from the territory on the borders between the medieval kingdoms of Scotland and England, an area that was not within the legal

‘Introduction’, in L. Russell *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous-European Encounters in Settler Societies* (Manchester, 2001), 1-15.

¹⁷ S. Vaquerea-Vásquez, ‘Notes from an Unrepentant Border Crossing’, in J. Juffer *The Last Frontier: The Contemporary Configuration of the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Durham, 2006), 703.

¹⁸ Hingley 2008, op. cit. (n. 13); Hingley forthcoming, op. cit. (n. 1).

¹⁹ R. Edmond, ‘Home and Away: degeneration in imperialist and modernist thought,’ in H. J. Booth and N. Rigby, *Modernism and Empire* (Manchester, 2000), 39-63.

²⁰ E. Thomas, *Monumentality and the Roman Empire: Architecture in the Antonine Age* (Oxford, 2007), 109-10.

²¹ C. Lamont and M Rossington, *Romanticism's Debatable Lands* (Basingstoke, 2007), 4; c.f. A. Christianson, ‘Gender and nation: debatable lands and passable boundaries’, in G. Norquay and G. Smyth (eds) *Across the margins: Cultural Identity and change in the Atlantic archipelago* (Manchester, 2002), 67-82.

territory of either nation.²² It has been applied more widely to the disputed border territories in other colonial contexts and also to writings that cross boundaries.²³ In the context of Hadrian's Wall, we draw the idea of debatable lands in order to explore the reason behind its construction, manning, maintenance and everyday operation. From the perspective addressed here, the construction of the Wall in the AD120s builds upon an increasingly hybrid variety of imperial identities, re-projecting these through the creation of a monumental statement of imperial order, stability and might. Its construction projects an imperial focus upon creating a unified identity, attempting to find a solution to such cultural concerns through a monumental physical expression of bounding that is aimed at defining something that is actually relatively un-definable. This monumentality, however, was not empty rhetoric as the Wall was also intended to be both manned and used.²⁴ With milecastles and forts forming points of access, permeability allowed movement. Although the structure appeared divisive, its interactive nature made the grand gesture of construction available to all who moved through the landscape. Hadrian's Wall was one expression of a renewed focus upon a unified Roman identity, projected through the construction of new buildings and monuments throughout the cities of the Roman empire during the reign of Hadrian.²⁵ This grand physical statement created through the medium of the Wall also, perhaps, projects the problematic nature of the islands that constituted *Britannia* in the minds of the Roman elite.

4. *Britannia's* marginality

The substantial form of the Wall poses relevant questions. It is generally recognized to be the most complex and best preserved of the frontiers of the Roman empire.²⁶ We are not making a nationalistic point here. An emphasis on the scale and prominence of Hadrian's

²² Lamont and Rossington 2007, op. cit. (n. 21).

²³ Lamont and Rosssington 2007, op. cit. (n. 21); G. Norquay and G. Smyth, *Across the margins: Cultural Identity and change in the Atlantic archipelago* (Manchester, 2002).

²⁴ J.C. Mann, 'The Function of Hadrian's Wall', *Archaeologia Aeliana*⁵ XVIII (1990), 51-4.

²⁵ A.R. Birley, *Hadrian: The restless emperor* (London, 1997); M. T. Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire* (Princeton, 2000); Thomas 2007, op. cit (n. 20), 26-7.

²⁶ D.J.P Mason, 'Introduction', in M. F. A. Symonds and D. J. P. Mason (eds) *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall* (Durham, 2009), xv.

Wall has been used since the early eighteenth century to argue for the special status of Britain in the Roman mind and to link the grandeur of imperial Rome with the ambitions of Great Britain overseas.²⁷ This is not a position with which we would concur, but Hadrian's Wall does appear to be physically more substantial and impressive than many other Roman frontiers across the empire. Why did Rome build such a substantial frontier here? In comparison, the German *limes* was less monumental and constructed from turf and timber, despite this the *limes* may have been consistently involved in conflict in a manner which was not the case for Hadrian's Wall. In the past, the scale of this 'fortification' has been tied in with the idea of the strength of native opposition to Rome in central Britain.²⁸ The nature of opposition to Rome in *Britannia* was probably no stronger than elsewhere along the empire's northern frontier and the structure of Hadrian's Wall was not directly defensive:²⁹ so why build such a substantial wall? One suggestion is that the scale and physical character of the Wall reflects Britain's nature as a special and marginal place in the Roman mind.³⁰ Such an idea ties in well with David Breeze's recent proposal that the special nature of this Wall, its regularity and stone construction, result from Hadrian's role in its design. *Britannia* was conquered late in the expansion of Rome and classical sources, in particular Tacitus, suggest that the Romans saw this place as particularly barbaric and marginal.³¹ Its location across Ocean made it ritually symbolic,³² resulting in efforts by the Roman military and administrators

²⁷ Hingley 2008, op. cit. (n. 13), 116.

²⁸ D. Breeze, 'Did Hadrian design Hadrian's Wall?', *Archaeologia Aeliana* ⁵, XXXVIII (2009), 98; Hingley 2008, op. cit. (n. 13), 122-33; Hingley 2010 op. cit. (n. 9).

²⁹ Breeze 2008 op. cit. (n. 12); Breeze 2009, op. cit. (n. 28); B. Dobson, 'The Function of Hadrian's Wall', *Archaeologia Aeliana* ⁵ XIV (1986), 1-30; J.C. Mann, 'Power, Force and the Frontiers of the Empire', *Journal of Roman Studies* CXIX (1979), 175-83; Mann 1990, op. cit. (n. 24); S.P. Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy* (London, 1999).

³⁰ D. Braund, *Ruling Roman Britain: kings, queens, governors and emperors from Julius Caesar to Agricola* (London, 1996); K. Clarke (2001). 'An island Nation: re-thinking Tacitus' *Agricola*', *Journal of Roman Studies* 91 (2001), 94-112.

³¹ Clarke 2001, op. cit. (n. 30).

³² Mattern 1999, op. cit. (n. 29), 60-1.

to bring Britain and its people into the ambit of Roman civilization during the later first century. Tacitus writes that the Roman governor Agricola's construction of a line of forts between the Forth and Clyde in the late 70s and early 80 AD created a new boundary to this island territory.³³ Hadrian's Wall would appear to have achieved a comparable function in a more monumental form 50 years later. This process of the incorporation of the peoples of Britain into the cultural and economic structure of the Roman empire appears to have slowed as Rome spread north and west in the late first to early second century. Indeed, the Roman administration seems to have struggled to incorporate and assimilate areas across central and northern Britain. The Wall may reflect a limiting of imperial ambition to the lands south of the Solway-Tyne isthmus, essentially a failure of the Roman administration to incorporate the majority of the frontier zone's population into a visible form of Roman imperial cultural identity.³⁴ However, viewing the Wall as an attempt at creating an imperial identity in these debateable lands shows that its construction and use may have been indicative of Roman ambition, rather than apathy.

From Flavian times forward, the elite of southern British *civitates* appear to have been effectively incorporated into the expanding Roman state, in a way that drew their governing classes into effectively 'becoming Roman'. Urban developments at *civitas* centres such as Verulamium (Hertfordshire) and Silchester (Hampshire) in the late first century show a growing assimilation of the ruling classes of certain southern peoples.³⁵ By the early second century this urban-based civilization appears to have been spreading across much of the lowlands of Britain, but the same does not appear true of the peoples in what was in the process of becoming the frontier regions of *Britannia*. In the area just south of what was to become Hadrian's Wall, towns long continued to have direct military associations and villas are very rare.³⁶ This may suggest that across much of central Britain, the area traditionally called the 'military zone', Rome came to dominate

³³ Tacitus *Agricola* xx; see Clarke 2001, op. cit. (n. 30); M. Fulford (2002). 'A second start: From the defeat of Boudicca to the third century', in P. Salway, *The Roman Era* (Oxford, 2002), 45.

³⁴ R. Hingley, 'Rural Settlement in Northern Britain', in M. Todd, *A Companion to Roman Britain* (Oxford, 2004), 327-48.

³⁵ Fulford 2002, op. cit. (n. 33).

³⁶ Hingley 2004, op. cit (n. 34).

local societies which it found difficult or impossible to assimilate into its expanding system. Many indigenous people continued to live in traditional ways, in round houses and ‘native settlements’, without much apparent Roman impact on their settlements or lives. Although a few villas have been found in what is today north-eastern England, there is no sign of a viable local self-governing elite to compare to the areas with *civitas* capitals in the south of the province.³⁷

This may well mark out the frontier zone of Britain as especially marginal in traditional Roman imperial terms. In this zone, the imperial ideal of spreading civilization (*humanitas*) to self-governing elites, perhaps, came to be challenged.³⁸ How unusual such a state of affairs really was is unclear. Work throughout the western empire, in Germany, Iberia and Gaul, is indicating that the once-dominant Romanization paradigm implies too simple a conception of imperially-directed cultural change, upon the regular occurrence of Mediterranean-style cities and monumental villas. It would now appear that many areas did not develop the regular network of villas that the Romanization paradigm suggested and that many other ways of living are represented across the Roman empire.³⁹ But the indigenous settlements that occur across central Britain appear particularly lacking in evidence for Roman impact, even imported pottery and Roman coins appear scarce on these sites.⁴⁰ How do these observations relate to the building of Hadrian’s Wall?

5. Hadrian’s Wall and the creation of imperial unity at the frontier

Simon James has written of the people who lived in the forts and towns of the Wall zone, from the early second century onwards, as an effectively Romanized community,

³⁷ Hingley 2004, op. cit (n. 34).

³⁸ For *humanitas*, see Woolf 1998 op. cit (n. 5), 54-60.

³⁹ Hingley 2005, op. cit. (n. 5), 102.

⁴⁰ Hingley 2004, op. cit. (n. 34); M. Symonds, ‘The Pre-Roman Archaeology of the Tyne-Solway Isthmus’, in M. F. A. Symonds and D. J. P. Mason, *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall* (Durham, 2009), 5-9.

characterized by a military population of incomers.⁴¹ In his terms, the wealth of Roman dedications and quantities of Roman goods – pottery, amphorae, coins, buildings, *etc.* – from along the line of Hadrian’s Wall indicates the creation of a Roman identity amongst the soldiers who provided its garrison. This Roman identity, in James’ terms is a ‘sub-culture’, a Roman military identity that subsumed the communities recruited to serve in the army across the empire and, in this case, settled on the Wall’s line. Such a community was created on Hadrian’s Wall in the AD 120s, through the construction and occupation of the frontier works, surviving in some form, until the early fifth century AD. It has already been noted that these Romanized communities did not subsume the local populations, which continued lives that appear rather comparable to the pre-Roman ways of their ancestors.⁴²

We would add to James’ helpful work on military sub-cultures in *Britannia* by suggesting that, Wall-communities are also part of an increasingly disparate series of Roman cultures that occur across the province of Britain and throughout the Roman empire. In order to expand and incorporate people across its vast territories, Rome was assimilating people who adopted a form of Roman culture, but one that was not directly the same as the elite cultures of the urban-dwelling local governing classes of the *civitates* of Lowland Britain and Gaul. Greg Woolf has written persuasively of these local elites in Gaul as ‘becoming Roman’ during the early periods of Roman rule in Gaul and these ideas have been extended to the Lowland areas of Britain, where *civitas* capitals and villas develop.⁴³ The degree to which the military auxiliary communities that served along Hadrian’s Wall were truly Roman is, however, problematic.⁴⁴ These people were recruited into and served in the Roman army. They fought the empire’s wars and protected its frontiers, but to what extent can they really be argued to have become Roman? The complexity of identities across the empire is discussed by Woolf in Roman

⁴¹ S. James, “‘Romanization’ and the people of Britain’, in S. Keay and N. Terrenato, *Italy and the West: comparative issues in Romanization* (Oxford, 2001), 187-209.

⁴² Hingley 2004, *op. cit.* (n. 34).

⁴³ Woolf 1998, *op. cit.* (n. 5); James 2001, *op. cit.* (n. 41).

⁴⁴ R. Hingley, ‘Cultural Diversity and Unity: empire and Rome’, in S. Hales and T. Hodos (eds) *Material Culture and Social Identities in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 2009), 54-75.

Achaea, where the appearance of Roman material culture may not exist in a one-to-one relationship with the process of becoming Roman.⁴⁵

James has studied how wearing military uniform, eating military food from imported tableware, marching in order, learning Latin and living in a Roman fort might help to create something of a new culture among members of the Roman auxiliary forces in *Britannia*.⁴⁶ In these terms, the physical acts of the building and manning of Hadrian's Wall also helped to create the imperial identities of the legionary and auxiliary soldiers who lived and worked along it. Constructional ability was clearly highly regarded, the prominent role building scenes play on Trajan's Column show that this aspect had a clear propaganda function which probably reflected the real world situation. Hadrian's speech to the *Ala I Hispanorum*, recorded at Lambaesis, makes it clear that construction was inspirational and equally important to the soldiery as military victory.⁴⁷ Roman military constructs were thus tangible evidence of both the victorious nature of Rome's military and its technical skill. Hadrian's Wall was occupied by auxiliary soldiers derived from across the empire, themselves legally different from Roman citizen soldiery, demonstrating the vast resources of Rome and gave an active example of becoming Roman.⁴⁸ Through their experience of living a Roman military life, building and occupying Roman structures, these people were enabled to become part of the Roman military sub-culture. The Wall emphasized a form of Romaness in a marginal, contested landscape, amongst indigenous peoples who in the long term do not appear to have appreciated the values spread by the Roman cultural initiative. Through the act of constructing the monument and the routines of manning and supplying the Wall, soldiers

⁴⁵ G. Woolf, 'Becoming Roman, Staying Greek', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* XL (1994), 116-43.

⁴⁶ S. James, 'The Community of Soldiers', in P. Baker, C. Forcey, S. Jundi and R. Witcher (eds) *TRAC 1998: Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Leicester 1998* (Oxford, 1999), 14-25; James 2001, op. cit. (n. 41).

⁴⁷ Thomas 2007 op. cit. (n. 20), 27-8.

⁴⁸ R. Hartis, *Beyond Functionalism: A Quantitative Survey and Semiotic Reading of Hadrian's Wall* (PhD Thesis, Durham, 2009).

and traders established and reaffirmed their imperial roles and identities,⁴⁹ reinforced through their everyday lives, rituals and burials.

From the perspectives developed here, Roman military identity formed another way of becoming Roman.⁵⁰ This military identity for the empire's common soldiers is not directly comparable to the elite models of Roman culture explored by Greg Woolf, Emma Dench and others.⁵¹ Common soldiers, in imperial terms, were low-status individuals. Their commanding officers may have had some imperial status, but common auxiliary (even legionary) soldiers were not members of the provincial or imperial elite. However, in the context of the local communities in which they settled, these soldiers will have had a considerable elevated status in their dealings with local people.⁵² The forts and buildings in which these people lived, their access to items of personal adornment including weapons and imported foodstuffs will have given them particular power in the contexts of the regions in which they had come to serve. The construction of the Wall—with its forts, milecastles, temples and *vici*—together with acts of the commemoration of gods and dead people, will have defined the explicitly Roman character of the Wall's population. In the context of central Britain this was a very different identity from that of indigenous society, since there is relatively little evidence that indigenous people started to construct Roman style buildings or settlements or that they adopted new ways of eating, living and commemorating their dead.

The antiquarian William Stukeley and the novelist Rudyard Kipling saw Hadrian's Wall as a linear Roman town that followed the south side of the rampart.⁵³ In Kipling's terms, in *Puck of Pook's Hill*,

⁴⁹ Hingley 2005, op. cit. (n. 5), 94.

⁵⁰ Hingley 2009, op. cit. (n. 44).

⁵¹ Woolf 1998, op. cit. (n. 5); Dench 2005, op. cit. (n. 5).

⁵² Hingley 2005, op. cit. (n. 5), 94.

⁵³ W. Stukeley, 'Iter Boreale,' in *Itinerarium Curiosum. Or, an Account of the Antiquities and Remarkable Curiositys in Nature or Art, Observed in Travels through Great Britain* (London, 1776), 17-77; R. Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill* (London, 1906).

‘just when you think you are at the world’s end, you see a smoke from east to west as far as the eye can stretch, houses and temples, shops and theatres, barracks and granaries, trickling along like dice behind’.⁵⁴

Kipling makes it clear that he believed the Wall was at the edge of Rome’s assimilative powers, or, perhaps, even beyond this boundary zone and modern archaeological work supports this. Many of the indigenous peoples who live to the south of the Wall’s line would not have appeared at all Roman to the emperor Hadrian when, it has been argued that, he visited the east end of the Wall in AD 122.⁵⁵ They lived in roundhouses in peasant settlements, without access to many imported artefacts. Models that pre-suppose the Wall as a herald of Roman apathy categorize such people as unable to support further Roman imperial expansion. However, the Wall’s porous character, long a cause of concern for divisive interpretations, shows that an essential aspect to the structure was its intent to be used. With provision for crossing every Wall-mile, the structure systematically provides opportunities for traversal regardless of the landscape. Whilst a structure forcibly controlling movement yet simultaneously making the process as easy as possible seems contradictory, it is vital to consider the effects and meaning involved when crossing the Wall. The vast remodelling of the landscape reflected the huge control over labour and resources the Romans could wield. Its existence demonstrated Roman technical ability and in constructing a crossable barrier the Romans created a forum for the mediation of their status with non-Romans. The symbolic and religious connotations of such structures also led to displays of Roman culture and the potential use of Wall as a customs barrier further reinforced such display, money taken in such one-sided relationships emphasised Roman status.⁵⁶ Importantly, function in such a model is no longer an end in itself, but rather a step in a larger process. These factors indicate the Wall may have been intended to play a key social, rather than military, role.

⁵⁴ Kipling 1906, op. cit. (n. 53), 173.

⁵⁵ Birley 1997, op. cit. (n. 25), 130-1; Breeze 2009, op. cit. (n. 28), 90.

⁵⁶ Mattern 1999, op. cit. (n. 29), 161.

6. Looking both ways before crossing

The Wall defined the Roman military community that maintained and occupied its structure. Drawing on Edmund Thomas' stimulating account of the Antonine Wall, we can consider the imperial motivation for the construction of Hadrian's Wall.⁵⁷ It is likely that Hadrian visited the east of the Wall during his visit to Britain in AD122 and he may have inspected the location in which this construction was proposed and helped to plan certain elements of the work.⁵⁸ The scale and relative regularity of the structure of Hadrian's Wall highlighted the monumentality of the works, despite the construction of the rampart and forts from relatively rough masonry.⁵⁹ As Thomas emphasizes, drawing on the works of Aelius Aristides, the frontiers of the empire become a metaphor for the scale and magnificence of the Roman army that manned such areas.⁶⁰ Aristides reflected on the frontiers as 'a second line beyond the outermost ring of the civilized world'.⁶¹ Importantly, this notional placement of the frontiers beyond 'civilization' shows that such structures did not signify an end to Roman ambition. Hadrian's biographer, over 200 years after the building of the Wall, believed that its then purpose was to divide the barbarians from the Romans,⁶² but were all the barbarians entirely on the far side of the frontiers?

It has long been enigmatic, in these terms, that the Wall effectively faces two ways. The vallum was constructed as a major physical boundary that defined and identified the Wall from the south, perhaps demarcating a military compound.⁶³ This complex earthwork is

⁵⁷ Thomas 2007 op. cit. (n. 20), 45-6.

⁵⁸ Birley 1997, op. cit. (n. 25), 130-1; Breeze 2009, op. cit. (n. 28), 90-1.

⁵⁹ P. Bidwell and P. Hill, 'The Stone Curtain,' in M.F.A. Symonds and D.J.P. Mason, *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall* (Durham, 2009), 36-41.

⁶⁰ Thomas 2007, op. cit. (n. 20), 46.

⁶¹ Quoted by Thomas, op. cit. (n. 20), 46.

⁶² *SHA* 11.2.

⁶³ T. Wilmott, 'The Vallum: how and why: A review of the evidence', in P. Bidwell (ed.) *Understanding Hadrian's Wall* (Kendal, 2008), 119-28; T. Wilmott, 'The Vallum', in M.F.A.

not paralleled on other Roman frontiers across the empire. In Britain, it appears, that some effort had to be made to define and identify this frontier work in terms of communities living within its bounds, creating a focus upon who was to be included and who excluded, perhaps delineating a military, Roman-centric, corridor in a marginal land. However, the potent symbolism of a reordered landscape could effect more than the communities living within its bounds. As noted, the Wall was not planned as a hermetic seal and allowed people to pass. By occupying the Tyne-Solway isthmus it had to be used, there were not alternate ways to move through the landscape. This highlights the structure's fundamental dichotomy: it was at once an exclusive and inclusive structure.

Recent accounts of Roman identity and social change have focussed upon its hybrid nature.⁶⁴ This suggests that the large scale incorporation of people into a disparate Roman culture may have been placing stress on the creation of a more central concept of Roman imperial culture.⁶⁵ Perhaps this very insecurity of ideas about the nature of being Roman, in itself, led to an increasing emphasis in the first and early second centuries on the physical and conceptual bounding of Roman imperial space.⁶⁶ The Wall, in these terms, may be viewed as an assertive measure aimed at defining the physical boundaries of Roman identity and space through a physical statement of imperial might, an act of construction and maintenance which included the people who manned the frontier in addition to the architecture of the Wall itself.⁶⁷ This clear definition of space can be connected to an attempt to define the nature of being Roman. Again, given the porous character of the Wall, this was both inclusive and exclusive.

The theory of Becoming Roman and the subsequent development of ideas on Roman identity by Emma Dench in terms of a culture of inclusion and exclusion continue,⁶⁸

Symonds and D.J.P. Mason, *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall* (Durham, 2009), 50-3.

⁶⁴ Hingley 2005, op. cit. (n. 5), 117-8.

⁶⁵ Hingley 2009, op. cit. (n. 44).

⁶⁶ Hingley 2008, op. cit. (n. 3).

⁶⁷ Thomas 2007, op. cit. (n. 20), 46; Hartis 2009, op. cit. (n. 48).

⁶⁸ Woolf 1998, op. cit. (n. 5); Dench 2005, op. cit. (n. 5).

effectively, to emphasize the unifying nature of Roman culture. By the time of Hadrian, the large-scale movement of people throughout the empire and across its frontiers must have created a fairly hybrid cultural mix, particularly in the major urban centres of the empire and, also, in the frontier zones, where auxiliaries were stationed who had been recruited from across the empire. Roman citizenship incorporated varying cultural groups spread across the empire and the unifying ethos of Roman culture enabled these people to adopt aspects of Roman culture whilst developing their own imperial credentials, or not, as the case may be.⁶⁹ The broadly assimilative nature of Roman imperial identity led to the successful expansion of the empire in the later first millennium BC and early first millennium AD.⁷⁰ Roman culture was malleable and transformative and this, as Greg Woolf, Emma Dench and others have stressed, explains the assimilative success of late Republican and early imperial Rome. A flexibility of imperial policy, deriving from the ‘Romulus’ Asylum’ origin myth of Roman society helps to explain the successful expansion of the Roman empire until, perhaps, the late first century AD.⁷¹ The Romans could incorporate disparate groups of local elites - across Italy, the Mediterranean and north-western Europe - into the power structure of empire by, effectively, leaving them in charge of their communities while supplying them with now highly powerful ways of life that enabled them to communicate increased status in an empire that aimed to spread universal peace inside its frontiers.⁷²

It is commonly observed that the period of imperial stability, during the early second century, that saw the construction of frontier structures in Britain and on the continent, witnesses the effective ending of imperial ambitions of expansion.⁷³ The creation of physical frontier structures, in this context, may accompany the ending of Rome’s expansive policy, a tendency that is often thought to have evolved from the end of Augustus’ reign when he is supposed to have left instructions to Tiberius not to expand

⁶⁹ Woolf 1998, op. cit. (n. 5).

⁷⁰ Hingley 2005, op. cit. (n. 5).

⁷¹ Dench 2005, op. cit. (n. 5).

⁷² Hingley 2005, op. cit. (n. 5), drawing on Woolf 1998 op. cit. (n. 5) and other authors.

⁷³ Birley 1997, op. cit. (n. 25); Breeze and Dobson 2000, op cit (n. 14), 26.

the borders of the empire.⁷⁴ However, the mutability of some such borders is demonstrated in the east, where the perceived boundary of Roman power changed from the Euphrates in the time of Augustus, to the Tigris by Severus.⁷⁵ In the context discussed above, the Wall's creation of Roman-centric space provided tangible propagandistic examples of Roman life available to all who moved through the landscape. By conditioning space in a Roman format, and making the use of this space a requirement of movement, the Wall both symbolically and practically altered life along Roman lines. In the company of other examples of 'becoming Roman', the Wall's effects were not limited solely to elites.⁷⁶ Thus the Wall appears to be a reaction to the apparent failure of traditional methods of propagating Roman culture in *Britannia*, representing a new method of attaining the same goals. Thus, rather than being solely exclusive, the Wall contributed to the ongoing dialogue on the nature of Roman culture. The involvement of discrepant experience, enforced through power imbalance, created a further form of 'Roman-ness' as distinct from the traditional elite character as Roman military identity itself. Ironically it was these soldiers that so often contributed to the propaganda images at Rome's monumental core.

7. Conclusion: becoming (partly) Roman on the Wall

As recent work has emphasized, the myth of a unified imperial culture embodied in approaches to Romanization is unrealistic. People became Roman in transformational ways that created new forms of imperial identity in their own homelands and the areas to which they moved, including the imperial frontiers. Many of the new forms of culture that arose are Roman in the terms that they existed within the political territory of Roman governance, but they were not really fully Roman in any meaningful sense. Thus, the idea that the majority of people living in the northern province of *Britannia*, or in the territory of the *Batavi*, were in any sense Roman, devalues the concept of Roman culture—an idea that should really be retained for the Roman elite. Peoples across Britain and the western part of the empire reacted to the physical presence of Rome and their cultures

⁷⁴ This is a simplified version of the arguments included in Breeze and Dobson 2000, op. cit. (n. 14), 4-5.

⁷⁵ Mattern 1999. op. cit. (n. 29), 110.

⁷⁶ Hingley 2005. op. cit. (n. 5).

transformed, but their identities would not be seen as Roman by the elite of the Mediterranean core, or even, by the urban elite of the provinces of the far north and west.⁷⁷ You would not become Roman in the elite mind just because you used a *terra sigilata* bowl, spoke a form of Latin or lived in a barrack block along with other soldiers. Hadrian's Wall, from this perspective, becomes a vast physical statement of imperial might. It also emphasizes the transformative nature of this immense empire built on the basis of twin aspects of the campaigning of the Roman army and the unifying effects of the assimilative culture of Rome. The problem for Roman imperial unity in the early second century AD, from the perspective that we are addressing, is that this assimilation in some terms had been too effective. The nature of the recruitment of auxiliaries into the Roman army provides a clear indication of the success of such a policy, despite setbacks like the Batavian revolt. That the empire's traditional methods of incorporation ceased to be effective in *Britannia* can be seen with the lack of Roman material culture amongst the descendants of the indigenous communities in the north of the province. This necessitated an alternative method of incorporation that can be seen in the Wall's form, effects and day-to-day operation. In Britain, the issue of incorporation may have been particularly problematic, as the Roman elite had long seen the island as both special and particularly un-Roman. These issues may help to explain why Hadrian planned such a substantial Wall for the Tyne and Solway gap and also, perhaps, why Hadrian's Wall remained in use for much of the period until the early fifth century AD. It may well be the case that continued occupation represents the failure of the structure in its goal of non-elite incorporation, further contributing to the unique nature of Hadrian's Wall as part of the debatable lands of central Britain.

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⁷⁷ Hingley 2009, op. cit. (n. 44).

⁷⁸ Hingley 2008, op. cit. (n. 3); Hingley 2010, op. cit. (n. 9); Hingley forthcoming, op. cit. (n. 1); Hartis 2009, op. cit. (n. 48); Witcher et al 2010, op. cit. (n. 6).

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