

bi **Stuart McHardy**



Roman coin - AD 69 - 79

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Gliog an seo gus an aiste seo leughadh sa Ghàidhlig

Unfortunately due to circumstances beyond our control the Gaelic version of this article has been delayed. It will be published as soon as it becomes available. We apologise for the inconvenience.

Julius Caesar’s famous sayin Veni, Vidi, Vici “A cam, A saw, A conquest” is aw verra weel but it’s about England. Up here it wis awthegither different. No that ye’d ken bi the attention peyed by archaeologists an historians tae the Romans in Scotland.

Tak a look in the Early Peoples galleries o the Museum o Scotland an ye cin see the problem. The Roman stuff is gaithert thegither an the Pictish stuff scattert about, as if the Romans are central tae oor past an the Picts jist a wee add on. An till nae that lang ago there wis a lot mair diggin on Roman sites in Scotland nor awthin else pit thegither.

Ae reason fer this is jist cos the Roman sites are there fer aw tae see. A fer instance up at Braco, north o Dunblane, there is a Roman mairchin camp that wis used mebbe a handfu o times on campaigns that is still gey obvious. The massive dirt waas are still standin near twa thousand years eftir they were pit up bi the legions. An it’s mair nor likely that sic camps wis used fer jist a few nichts at a time, tho sometimes mair or aince.

Naethin indigenus fae the period sticks oot like yon. An Braco wis jist ane o dizzens o mairchin camps an forts they raised, apairt fae the Antonine Wa, fer naebody cin deny they cam up quite a few times tae Scotland. But hard as they tried, Agricola, Severus an aw thae ither Roman generals, they nivver did manage tae subdue the native tribes.

Anither thing about sic places is that archaeologists ken whit they’re lookin fer, fer they hae lots information fae England an the Continent as tae hou the legions operatit. We dinnae hae oniethin like the same level o knowledge about hou oor ain fowk cairried on – an no jist because they didnae bigg things on the same scale.

The fack is simple – far ower muckle o limitit archaeological resources have aye been pit in tae diggin up Roman sites in Scotland. Tae tell us whit exactly? That they came, they saw, they ran awa.

The verra action o lookin at Roman signal stations year eftir year is pairt o the real problem. An that problem is that the Romans arenae that important tae Scotland's history but seein they're sae central tae the haill notion o the British state they figure an affy lot in the thinkin o oor academic institutions.

The truth o the maitter is that England wis pairt o the Roman Empire fer fower hunder year. The fowk doun there were urbanised, organised tax-peyin citizens in much o the kintra while here, weel whit dae we ken about the Roams in Scotland? Fowk gang on about client 'kingdoms' north o Hadrian's Wa an some fowk yabber on anent a sphere o Roman influence atween Hadrian's an the Antonine Wa.

Weel let's jist see. Archaeology nou tells us that the Antonine wis stairtit in the 140s, mebbe feenisht by 146, abandonit afore 155, re-manned agin an abandonit again fer the final time in 167. So ower a period o twenty year they were in an oot at least aince, makkin the longest occupation at the maist fifteen year, if thon. An mind that the northern wa wis built o turf an no like Hadrian's Wa atween the Solway Firth an the Tyne, o stane. That's no a lang time tae subdue an area fu o armit tribal warriors. Shair there are places on baith the Forth and Clyde whaur the Roams pit up villas but it seems likely they were getting supplied bi sea bi the Roman navy. Tak a look at onie map o Roman sites in Scotland an whit ye see, apairt fae the Antonie Wa, are lines o forts an signal stations, aw verra weel tae support military campaigns, but no much uise in keeping doun an armit population.

Monie fowk hae made a lot o the find o Roman silver on Traprain Law in East Lothian, some goin sae far as tae claim this as proof o the local fowk, that the Romans cried the Votadini – later tae be cried the Gododdin – were a client tribe o the Empire. Weel it jist so happens that a lot mair Roman silver an ither goods hae been fund in Bavaria than in Scotland, an the Romans nivver got that far. Sic material micht be the result o some kin o trade but is jist as likely tae be loot fae raidin.

The thing is that the British view o historie wants tae mak Scotland as much like England as possible, an ane o the weys o daein that is tae convince fowk that at least some o the tribal fowk o early Scotland if they werenae ablow the Roman thumb, were in some wey behauden tae them. A beg tae differ.

Dio Cassion wrote in 217 that the Romans held the land sooth o the wa that 'dividit the island in hauf' an generations o historians hae tried tae convince theirsels he wis referrin tae the Antonine Wa. He cuidnae hae been - the Antonine Wa hid been desertit fifty year earlier, an it beggars aw belief that a mannie as weel connectit as Dio Cassio widnae hae heard o that!

Houanivver when it comes tae the Romans, Britishist academics seem tae aye bent ower backarties tae believe whit they tell us. The great Roman victory o Mons Graupius around the year 80 is ane o the conerstones o Scottish historie but we onlie hae Tacitus' ward fer it, an the

Roman commander Agricola had been his faither-in-law. There is nae corroborative evidence an the upshot o it wis that the Romans went back sooth. Some victory.

Fae the year 120 on, Hadrians' Wa wis constantly mannit till the Romans left around 406. How? Simply because o the fack that Roman rule stoppit there on the frontier an despite whit they wuid like tae think, oor Britishist historians hae nae evidence tae tell us different. Disnae stop them but.