

HADRIAN'S WALL: A STUDY IN FUNCTION

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by

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December 2014

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ABSTRACT

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by Mylinh V. Pham

Earlier studies on Hadrian's Wall have focused on its defensive function to protect the Roman Empire by foreign invasions, but the determination is Hadrian's Wall most likely did not have one single purpose, but rather multiple purposes. This makes the Wall more complex and interesting than a simple structure to keep out foreign intruders. Collective research on other frontier walls' functions and characteristics around the empire during the reign of Hadrian are used to compare and determine the possible function or functions of the Wall. The Wall not only served political purposes, but also had economic and social uses as well.

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DEDICATION

For my dad: I wanted to finish in time for you to see it done, and I'm glad you did. I hope you continue to be courageous for whatever lies ahead.

For my mom's perpetual strength.

For my daughter Alicia MyLe who is the constant sun in my life.

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INTRODUCTION

Hadrian is probably best known for the Wall in Britain named after him. Running about eighty Roman miles long, the Wall represented the northern frontier of the Roman Empire. According to the *Historia Augusta*, the Wall in Britain was built to keep the barbarians away from the Romans. Because of this, there is a general assumption that the Wall was constructed as a defensive structure to keep the native Britons from going into Roman territory and to keep the Romans safe from barbarian attacks in the north.

As scholars have completed more research on Hadrian's Wall and have found more archeological evidence along the old Stanegate line, modern historians' views have changed about the actual function of the Wall. This has been especially true after R.G. Collingwood challenged the traditional view of the purpose of Hadrian's Wall in 1921.¹ He raised questions of whether this Wall really was intended to be used solely for defense. Since Collingwood challenged the notion of defense, more recent scholars, such as the Birley family, have started to support Collingwood's theory against defense. Some historians, however, such as Steven Drummond, Lynn Nelson, and Edward Luttwak, continue to argue that the Wall was created with the purpose of defending the Roman Empire.

While it is general knowledge that the Emperor initiated the construction of Hadrian's Wall, it is not widely known that Hadrian also had other wall structures

¹ R.G. Collingwood, "The Purpose of the Roman Wall", *Vasculum*, 8.1, (Britain: Newcastle-Upon-Tyne), 1921, 4-9.

built on other frontiers around the empire. The frontier structures in Germany and in northern Africa had walls with similar characteristics to Hadrian's Wall. One could argue that Hadrian created an outline of the empire by having these walls constructed to define Roman territory, but these walls possibly had other functions as well. In researching the different uses of the frontier walls, and the construction of Hadrian's Wall, we can begin to make a hypothesis about the main purpose Hadrian's Wall.

The student of Hadrian's Wall must address many questions in trying to investigate its function. In order to understand the political, economic, and social situation better, especially in the area surrounding the Wall, one has to analyze the relationship between the Romans and the Britons. Was the relationship between the Romans and the Britons in fact hostile, as the *Historia Augusta* suggests, and did the Romans actually want to keep themselves separated from the people to the north, as indicated by Aelius Aristides? Additionally, one must consider whether the Wall was strictly used as a defensive structure, and if it was not, what intended purpose and function it did have?

In order to determine the other uses of Hadrian's Wall, one must first counter the defense argument by drawing out specific elements of the Wall that make it unlikely to be a completely fortified defensive structure. These flaws will help illustrate other possible intended purposes for the Wall. This thesis does not attempt to prove or disprove that Hadrian's Wall was a defensive structure. Defense was certainly one of its purposes. Most scholars, however, have seen

defense as the main reason for the initial construction of the Wall. The thesis, however, will discuss the Wall's multiple functions and the political, economic, and social motivations for building it. It will address the three main purposes of the Wall: defense, that is a political purpose; trade, an economic one; and its symbolic nature, a social aspect.

Although there are many publications on the separate functions of Hadrian's Wall, there are not many that combine the possible uses to determine the most probable purposes of the Wall. In looking at the possible motivations Hadrian had to build the Wall as a whole, one may be able to determine which is the specific cause of the construction of the Wall.

Included in this thesis is a map on page 17, created by Michael Espejo specifically for this paper, to show possible locations of tribal groups on Britannia who are suspected to have caused hostility and unrest for the Romans during their occupation. The location of these tribes may help in determining if the political events that were happening had any effect on the decision to construct the Wall.

CHAPTER ONE

SOURCES AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Writing a thesis on Hadrian's Wall presents many problems. The first and most obvious challenge is that the structure was built about two thousand years ago and there are a limited number of primary sources available and their reliability is in question. The works of ancient Roman historians, such as Julius Caesar, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio present a number of problems. The political tendentiousness of Julius Caesar is well known in *Gallic Wars*.² Tacitus wrote a laudatory biography of his father-in-law, Agricola, who was governor of Britannia from AD 77 to 85. Tacitus' view on Agricola's history was biased, and he did not care too much for geography and military history, nor did he give much respect to those that were not born into the noble class.³ Tacitus also mocked the Britons for adopting Roman culture.⁴ Hadrian's Wall predates Cassius Dio by about thirty years.⁵ Historians must rely on these sources in the attempt to interpret the past, yet their accuracy is often questioned and debate is constant. Moreover, these sources often present overly subjective views of the past.

Most important, the authors mentioned above, as well as many others in this thesis, were Romans and thus wrote from the Roman perspective. Prior to

² Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1994, 57.

³ H. Mattingly, Introduction: *Tacitus: The Agricola and Germania*, (London: Penguin Group), 1948, 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵ Fergus Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1964, 61-63.

the arrival of the Romans, scholars have no extant written history in Britain and thus they have only a limited glimpse of what really may have happened. Of course not all of the authors in this paper were ethnically Roman. Strabo was a Greek, who lived and traveled around the Roman Empire and beyond, but had a Hellenocentric viewpoint.⁶ Generally, however, these historians usually present history in a Romanized ethnocentric point of view and interpretation.⁷

The *Historia Augusta* is a source that is widely used throughout this paper, and also has its share of criticisms. Sir Ronald Syme believed the problem with using the *Historia Augusta* is that it is “permeated with fraudulence” and “its main professions (date, dedications, and authorship) deserve no credence.”⁸ He wrote an entire book critiquing the *Historia Augusta* and comparing it unfavorably to the work of Ammianus Marcellinus’ *History*. Syme extensively details the similarities between Ammianus’ *History* with that of the *Historia Augusta*, implying that the author or authors of the *Historia Augusta* duplicated Ammianus’ writings or based their own writings on those of Ammianus’.⁹ In spite of Sir Ronald Syme’s criticisms of the *Historia Augusta*, the biography of Hadrian contained in it, however, is generally considered the most reliable.¹⁰

⁶ William A. Koelsch, “Squinting Back at Strabo”, *Geographical Review*, American Geographical Society, Volume 94, Number 4, (October 2004): 503.

⁷ Breisach, *Historiography*, 53.

⁸ Sir Ronald Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, (London: Oxford University Press), 1968, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Sir Ronald Syme, *Emperors and Biography: Studies in the Historia Augusta*, (London: Oxford University Press), 1971, 56-57.

Our information on Britain is also concentrated on certain periods. The events during the time after Caesar's conquest of Britain in AD 43 to Agricola's reoccupation in AD 71 relies on minted coins distributed among tribes; but the authenticity of certain coins is suspect. Some of these coins have been proven to be fraudulent.¹¹ Tacitus' accounts of the invasion of Britain during the AD 40s in the *Annals* are lost, which leaves the account of Cassius Dio as the only source for this invasion. Since Dio wrote his *History* much later than actual events that he portrays, his accuracy can be questioned. In addition, Dio wrote that the Roman force had been divided into three sections during the invasion, indicating there might have been three separate viewpoints on what happened between the Romans and the Britons during this conflict. In addition, the events between the Romans and British tribes that were actually written down were extremely poorly recorded.¹²

Due to the paucity of ancient sources, the modern reconstructions of the early history of Roman Britain vary. Scholars differ on the importance of different rebellions. John Wachter, for example, never mentions the conflict between Venutius and Cartimandua in his article in the *Cambridge Ancient History*, and Catherine Ross focuses more on whether the Carvetii actually existed separately from the Brigantes, and where their loyalties actually lay. Wachter focuses on the

¹¹ John Wachter, "Chapter 13e: Britain 3 B.C. to A.D. 69: I. Pre-Conquest Period", *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume X: The Augustan Empire 43 B.C.-A.D. 69, Second Edition*, edited by Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin, and Andrew Lintott, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press), 1996, 503.

¹² *Ibid.*, 507-508.

Boudicca rebellion in AD 49 as the catalyst of Romanization in Britain, whereas Ross, Nicolas Hingham, and Barri Jones stress the importance of the Carvetii's rebellion that required the assistance of Petillius Cerialis and Agricola in the early 70s. Even within these arguments are separate debates as to whether a tribe called the Carvetii actually existed independent of the Brigantes, and whether or not the former were hostile toward the Romans. There are also multiple discrepancies and debates about tribal names, locations, and identities with Wachter, for example, questioning the location of the Iceni.¹³

Substantial debate also exists over the dating of archeological remains. The date of buildings and Hadrian's Wall's forts come into question because of the paucity of correlating archeological and written records. The same problem also affects the dating of Roman structures attributed to Cerialis, Frontinus, and Agricola.¹⁴ Vindolanda, an old Roman fort situated around the middle section of the Wall, is extremely important for reconstructing Roman frontier life along Hadrian's Wall. In recent years, Eric Birley and his sons Anthony and Robin, and grandson Andrew, have made it their family tradition to excavate this area surrounding the fort, which they own. The historical recreation of the Romanization of Britain between 69-193 is dependent on the slow ongoing acquisition and verification of archeological evidence with the wooden tablets

¹³ Wachter, "Britain", 510.

¹⁴ Michael Fulford, "Chapter 18: Britain", *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume XI: The High Empire A.D. 70-192, Second Edition*, edited by Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, and Dominic Rathbone, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press), 2000, 561.

found at Vindolanda being the main source for attempting to interpret life along Hadrian's Wall.¹⁵ Because of the limited number of primary sources and this research is dependent on the interpretation of others, there is always room for error and for others to reinterpret the findings.

¹⁵ Fulford, "Britain", 561.

CHAPTER TWO

HADRIAN'S WALL

During the last centuries BC and the first AD, there was a large migration to Britain from mainland Europe due to the Germanic pressure in Belgic Gaul and the Gallic campaigns of Julius Caesar. This brought more mainland influences to the island. The first of these immigrations started around 150 BC, which led to what is known as the Belgic Iron Age. The Belgic migrations and Caesar's arrival introduced to the island of Britain a documented history with the circulation of coins and written records and inscriptions, but no other history of the Britons can be recreated before the arrival of Caesar. The Belgic culture was heavily influenced by mainland Europe, which made the transition to Roman invasion a little more fluid than that in the northern parts of Britain.¹⁶

There is not much written history of the Britons before contact with the Romans. What we know about the native peoples is relayed secondhand by Roman observation, and gleaned from archeological remains. There is evidence of cattle grazing and horse breeding, which played an important part in warfare and transport.¹⁷ Stockaded enclosures have been excavated in the West Country and south Wales, where widely spaced ramparts and ditches seemed to have been constructed near good water supplies and grazing land. There were many fortresses with multiple functions and purposes, both offensive and defensive,

¹⁶ Stanley Thomas, *Pre-Roman Britain*, (London: Studio Vista Limited.), 1965, 37 and 40.

¹⁷Ibid., 39.

and a large amount of military equipment has been found in the southern part of Britain. The fort and the equipment are evidence of petty warfare, most likely within different tribes on the island.

Religious ceremonies and practices are evident through metalwork uncovered in the forest areas, which indicate sacred groves associated with the Celtic Druids.¹⁸ There seems to have been a large population living on the island of Britannia as Caesar described those he encountered:

The number of the people is countless, and their buildings exceedingly numerous, for the most part very like those of the Gauls: the number of cattle is great. They use either brass or iron rings, determined at a certain weight, as their money. Tin is produced in the midland regions; in the maritime, iron; but the quantity of it is small: they employ brass, which is imported. There, as in Gaul, is timber of every description, except beech and fir. They do not regard it lawful to eat the hare, and the cock, and the goose; they, however, breed them for amusement and pleasure. The climate is more temperate than in Gaul, the cold being less severe.¹⁹

Of Britain's geography and people, Strabo says:

Most of the island is flat and overgrown with forests, although many of its districts are hilly. It bears grain, cattle, gold, silver, and iron. These things, accordingly, are exported from the island, as also hides, and slaves, and dogs that are by nature suited to the purposes of the chase; the Celti, however, use both these and the native dogs for the purposes of war too. The men of Britain are taller than the Celti, and not so yellow-haired, although their bodies are of

¹⁸ Thomas, *Pre-Roman Britain*, 34-37.

¹⁹ Julius Caesar, *Gallic Wars*, translated by W. A. McDevitte and W. S. Bohn, (New York: Harper & Brothers), 1869, 5.12.
<<http://classics.mit.edu/Caesar/gallic.html>>

looser build. Their weather is more rainy than snowy; and on the days of clear sky fog prevails so long a time that throughout a whole day the sun is to be seen for only three or four hours round about midday.²⁰

The Romans had their own ideas about the Britons, but nothing is really known about what the Britons thought of the Romans. Trade was important to the Britons with the abundance of food production in the area. Pottery was mass-produced on an industrial scale, used for burial wares and tableware, including cups, platters, beakers, and cooking storage, which gave the Romans and historians a better understanding of the cultural practices of the Britons.²¹

Both Caesar and Strabo provide descriptions of the physical geography of Britannia; Caesar wrote about the island in *Gallic Wars*, and Strabo wrote about it in his *Geography*. Both men noted that Britannia's geographic shape was that of a triangle.²² Caesar states that "one of its sides is opposite to Gaul," and that the south "side extends about 500 miles"²³. Livy and Fabius Rusticus "likened the shape of Britain as a whole to an elongated shoulder-blade or to an axe-head"²⁴. Strabo noted that the longest sides were about "four thousand three hundred – or four hundred – miles"²⁵. When Agricola first came to Britain, it was "the largest

²⁰ Strabo, *The Geography*, translated by H.L. Jones, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1978, 4.5.2.

²¹ Thomas, *Pre-Roman Britain*, 34-37.

²² Caesar, *Gallic Wars*, 5.13; Strabo, *Geography*, 4.5.1.

²³ Caesar, *Gallic Wars*, 5.13.

²⁴ Cornelius Tacitus, *The Agricola*, translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb, (New York: Fordham University), 1999, 10.3.

²⁵ Strabo, *Geography*, 4.5.1.

island known to the Romans.”²⁶ According to Strabo, “there are only four passages which are habitually used in crossing from the mainland to the island, those which begin at the mouths of the rivers — the Rhenus, the Sequana, the Liger, and the Garumna.” From Caesar’s naval port on the mainland, he was able to set sail to Britain at night and took only four hours to reach the island and arrived early the next day.

Caesar was the first Roman to enter Britain with an army. He made two trips to the island without accomplishing anything because some quarrels with the Celts and his soldiers back on the European demanded his attention. Caesar won a couple of battles against the Britons and thereafter, the Britons would be obligated to pay duties to the Romans, which offset the cost of the legion that stayed on the island to maintain Roman interests.²⁷ After the arrival of Caesar, with written records now available, the dynastic inheritance of power and authority was then traced, which gives modern scholars a little more understanding of ruling powers of different tribal groups in Britain after Roman contact.

After the arrival of the Romans, “Britain was thoroughly subdued and immediately abandoned”²⁸ by Julius Caesar. Because it is an island, Britain is accessible in many different directions, and each access point had a different

²⁶ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 10.2.

²⁷ Strabo, *Geography*, 4.5.3.

²⁸ Cornelius Tacitus *The History*, translated by Alfred John Church, William Jackson Brodrigg, and Sara Bryant, edited for Perseus, (New York: Random House, Inc.), 1942, 1.2.

significance in different periods of history. Hence, it was relatively easy for the Romans, Saxons, and Celts to invade because each side of the island was vulnerable to a different threat: to the west of the island was Ireland, in the east was the North Sea, and across the English Channel was France.²⁹ This threat was realized when Claudius invaded Britain in AD 43.³⁰ Roman rule in Britain was tenuous. In AD 47, King Prasutagus of the Iceni revolted against the Romans. Then his wife, Queen Boudicca, with the Trinovantes, led her own rebellion in AD 60 or 61.³¹

The theory that Hadrian's Wall was built because of rebellions caused by the Britons, specifically the Brigantes, has been widely accepted in the past.³² Because of the Carvetii rebellion in the 70s and Venutius' relationship with the Brigantian queen, and his subsequent occupation of the Brigantian kingdom, the Brigantes were believed by historians to have been the specific tribe that was constantly causing conflict and unrest for the Romans and needed to be controlled.³³ Hartley and Fitts; however, believe otherwise.³⁴ They hypothesize that the tribes that were actually causing trouble were other tribes of mixed

²⁹ Sheppard Frere, *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain*, Third Edition, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.), 1987, 1.

³⁰ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, translated by Earnest Cary, Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1978, 60.19-22.

³¹ Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals*, translated by Alfred John Church, William Jackson Brodrigg, and Sara Bryant, edited for Perseus, (New York: Random House, Inc.), 1942, 12:31-32; *Agricola*, 15.

³² B.R. Hartley and R. Leon Fitts, *The Brigantes*, (Gloucester, UK: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited), 1988, 1.

³³ Tacitus, *History*, 3:45.

³⁴ Hartley and Fitts, *Brigantes*, 24.

origins and not the Brigantes, from whom the Romans were not able to distinguish them. There were possibly six tribes that were controlled by the Brigantes.³⁵ In Hartley and Fitts' opinion, it is, therefore, inaccurate to assume that the Brigantes, as a whole, were the catalyst for the Wall being erected. Whatever the case, the Romans did aggressively try to Romanize the Brigantes and other British tribes, which probably caused a certain amount of animosity and unrest among the Britons.³⁶

One group that Hartley and Fitts mention as a possible troublesome sub-group of the Brigantes were the Carvetii. The Ordnance Survey's map of Roman Britain shows the Carvetii as a smaller sub-group that inhabited the area directly south of the Wall and north of the Brigantes.³⁷ Very little is known about the Carvetii and scholars even have differing opinions on their existence. It is noteworthy that Caesar only named six tribes during his expeditions, not mentioning Carvetii at all in his *Gallic Wars*. Tacitus does not mention the Carvetii in his *Histories* or *Annals* either. Indeed, their existence is also not mentioned in ancient literature – the only evidence of possible existence is one tombstone from Old Penrith and several milestones from Frenchfield and Langwathby in the Eden Valley. Since writing was not used in that region before the arrival of the Romans, it is possible that these stones date to a time long after

³⁵ Hartley and Fitts, *Brigantes*, 1.

³⁶ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 21.

³⁷ This map, published in 2010, lists pre-Roman tribes of Britain and their possible location within the island. Evidence has been compiled by the National Monuments Records, maintained by English Heritage, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

the invasion of Rome.³⁸ What makes the existence of the Carvetii important is the relationship between the native tribes and the Romans and the unrest that came about, which might have instigated the idea of creating a wall to somehow alleviate the pressures of native rebellion along the Stanegate.

Hartley and Fitts, Hingham and Jones, and Ross have debated over how the Brigantes, who were supposedly just one single group, were able to rule such a large area.³⁹ Ross questions whether the native Britons actually distinguished themselves from one another as separate “tribes” and she believes that the groups in Britain during the late Iron Age or Early Roman period did not attach themselves to a specific region. Thus, the idea that the Carvetii as a separate group from the more populous Brigantes may not be correct.⁴⁰ She also suggests that the Carvetii was a *civitas* of the Brigantes and later became a sub-group of the Brigantes.⁴¹

The existence of the Carvetii may be questionable, but historians are more certain of the existence of the rebel king of the Brigantes, Venutius. The origin of Venutius is unclear; he might have been born into the Brigantes or married into them for political purposes. According to Ross, Venutius most likely came from

³⁸ Catherine Ross, “The Carvetii – A Pro-Roman Community?”, *Transactions of the Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archeological Society*, Third Series, Volume XII, Edited by Professor P.L. Garside, (United Kingdom: Titus Wilson & Son, Kendal), 2012, 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴¹ David CA Shotton, *Romans and Britons in North-West England*, (United Kingdom: University of Lancaster, Centre for North-West Regional Studies), 1997, 5.

the Eden Valley, where there seems to have been an anti-Roman sentiment.⁴²

Tacitus simply states Venutius was married to Queen Cartimandua of the Brigantes and the conflict that ensued, but does not place Venutius as part of a sub-group called the Carvetii.⁴³

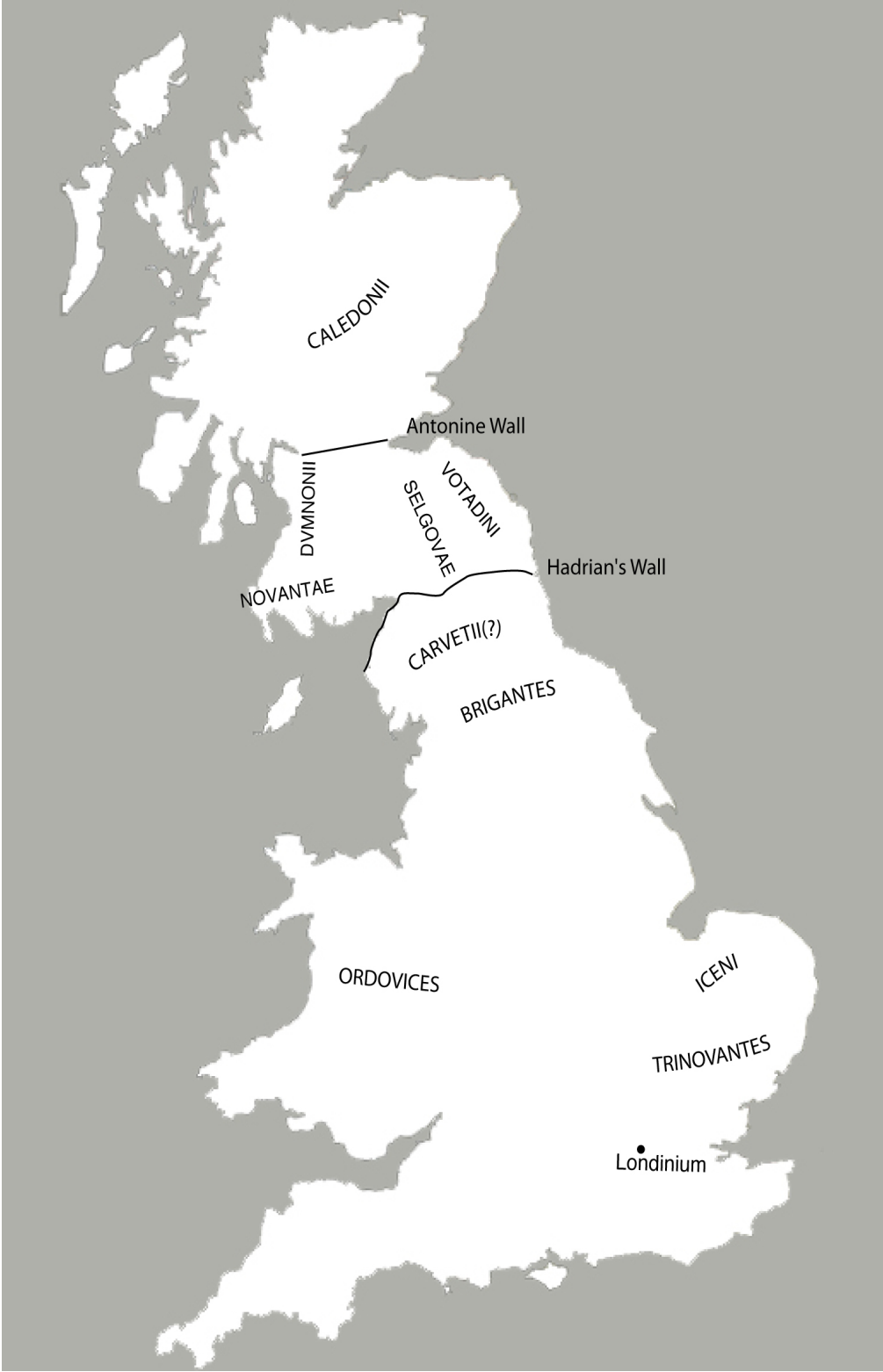
“Cartimandua ruled the Brigantes in virtue of her illustrious birth,” being noble from birth and inherited the throne. Queen Cartimandua’s Brigantes kingdom seems to have been different than that of her first husband, Venutius, who was particularly associated with the Carvetian area located further north.⁴⁴ Hingham and Jones suggest that Venutius was the leader of the anti-Roman forces within the Brigantian kingdom, and formed a power base in the northern half of a loose Brigantian federation. Archeological evidence of a series of marching camps leading away from Stanwick, which was used to control the eastern approach along the Stanimore Pass, suggests that the governor Petillius Cerealis campaigned against Venutius in this area, who may well have used the Carvetii as the center of his power base.⁴⁵

⁴² Ross, “Carvetii”, 65.

⁴³ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁴ Tacitus, *History*, 3.45; Hingham and Jones, *Carvetii*, 8. The manuscripts of Tacitus spell the queen’s name as *Cartismandua*, whereas modern historians tend to omit the “s” and refer to her as *Cartimandua*. For consistency purposes, the spelling of *Cartimandua* will be used in this thesis.

⁴⁵ Hingham and Jones, *Carvetii*, 11.



Map by Michael Espejo for “Hadrian’s Wall: A Study in Function”.

After the breakdown of Venutius and Cartimandua's marriage in AD 69, Venutius was in power until the arrival of Petilius Cerialis in AD 71.⁴⁶ Although Ross and Hingham and Jones debate on which tribal alliance Venutius belonged, they all do agree on is the existence of Venutius and that he led an anti-Roman movement, which stemmed from the conflict he had had with Cartimandua, Queen of Brigantia, documented in Tacitus. Ross, however, disputes whether Venutius was associated with the Carvetii at all. Ross suggests that the Carvetii were pro-Roman, and the hostility came from another sub-group that Venutius belonged to, but which has not yet been identified. She also suggests that Venutius was not associated with the Carvetii at all. Whatever the case, Venutius is the key to solving the mystery of the Carvetii.⁴⁷

Venutius' loyalties and his origination and the conflict with his wife, who was queen of the Brigantes, are very important factors to consider in figuring out if there was a connection between the conflict of the British tribes and Romans and the construction of Hadrian's Wall. According to Tacitus, Petillius Cerialis subdued the Brigantes, who were "said to be the most numerous tribe of the whole province" in AD 70.⁴⁸ If the existence of the Carvetii is fact, and if they were the specific anti-Roman sub-group that was led by Venutius, it would help prove that the Brigantes were not solely responsible for the unrest in Britain. It also gives us another reason why the Wall could have possibly been built.

⁴⁶ Ross, "Carvetii", 61.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 64-65.

⁴⁸ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 17.1.

According to the Ordnance Survey map, the Wall was built north of Carvetian territory, keeping the Carvetii in Roman territory. The Wall is also north of the supposed Brigantian territory. This might have been for offensive, rather than defensive measures. If the Carvetii were a hostile group, they would have to be confined within Roman territory in order to make it harder to recruit other tribes to rebel against the Romans. The Wall could have been used as a means to contain a threat and at the same time, Romanize the hostile Britons.

It took Agricola's trip to Britannia to organize the Roman administration. When Agricola was given governorship of the island of Britannia in AD 77, the Brigantes were "induced to give hostages and abandon their hostility: they were then so skillfully surrounded with Roman garrisons and forts that no newly acquired district ever before passed over to Rome without interference from the neighbors,"⁴⁹ inferring that the Romans tried to isolate the Brigantes so that they could not ally themselves with other tribal groups to rebel against the Romans. The Brigantes were also given Roman traditions during Agricola's tour in Britannia. The Romans tried to train the sons of chieftains in Roman education and culture and, "as a result, the nation which used to reject the Latin language began to aspire to rhetoric, [and] the wearing of our dress became a distinction, and the toga came into fashion, and little by little the Britons went astray into alluring vices: to the promenade, the bath, the well-appointed dinner table."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 20.3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.2.

Another group of Britons with whom the Romans had trouble with were the Caledonians in northern Britain, located north of what was to be the Antonine Wall in the Scottish Lowlands. Thinking they had the Caledonian tribe under control in AD 79, Agricola and his men let down their guard, and when the Caledonians learned that Agricola had divided his army into three parts, they attacked the Ninth Legion, in the area of modern-day Southern Scotland, at night before Agricola's other two armies came to put down the rebellion in AD 83.⁵¹

With so many rebellions from different groups of Britons, having a wall dividing them from their tribal neighbors to the north could have been a method to separate these Britons from their native culture and to limit interactions between tribe members wanting to conspire against the Romans⁵². It is possible that Hadrian's Wall was built for the purpose of separating the unruly natives from the more civilized Romans, but the issue with this is that the last major rebellion recorded before the arrival of Hadrian was in AD 83, almost forty years prior to Hadrian's arrival in Britain. This does not mean that there were no rebellions leading up to the construction of Hadrian's Wall, but there is little evidence to support that there were.

During Roman occupation in Britain, the Romans imposed taxes on the Brigantes, which could have caused some unrest from the natives during the governorship of Quintus Pompeius Falco from 118 to 122.⁵³ This probably

⁵¹ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 26.1.

⁵² Hartley and Fitts, *Brigantes*, 25.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22.

initiated the rebellions and conflict that came about due to the treatment of the Brigantes. They began causing a bit of trouble for the Romans, and it is believed that it was the Brigantes who rebelled, but were pushed back to the north by Falco, but not without the heavy loss of Roman soldiers.⁵⁴

Agricola also initiated the building of forts in Britannia, which later would become the foundation of the forts along Hadrian's Wall. The Britons did not help in building Roman forts on their land. It was the duty of the Roman soldiers to actually build the Wall, but the Britons were required to gather material for the forts and also to construct roads under the watchful eyes of the Roman army in their own land. One suspects that the native Britons were ill-treated by their Roman conquerors, who no doubt exploited them for labor and resources from their land.⁵⁵

When Domitian came to power in AD 81, he established the walls of the frontier in Germany, forty years prior to Hadrian's reign to secure the land. Domitian did this by linking a line of forts with a track and timber towers.⁵⁶ The native Chatti in Germany were waging war against the Roman army in this region, which would have necessitated Roman action. The purpose for the frontier fortifications in this area could have been used to keep the Chatti out of

⁵⁴ Anthony R. Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*, (London and New York: Routledge), 1997, 130.

⁵⁵ Hartley and Fitts, *Brigantes*, 22.

⁵⁶ Peter Hill, *The Construction of Hadrian's Wall*, (Great Britain: Tempus Publishing Limited), 2006, 15.

Roman territory, but might also have been to monitor their activity.⁵⁷ Roman territory actually continued past the German frontier barriers, and these walls were not extensive enough to prevent free Germans from crossing and they were not really a threat to the Roman army.⁵⁸ The fortifications in Germany could have served as a model to Hadrian's Wall.

During the reign of Trajan, a census of the *Brittones Anavioneses*, who were the people of the Annan valley in modern Scotland, was conducted. On the basis of this census, young Britons were forced to enroll as frontier guards in Upper Germany. The majority of British soldiers were Brigantes, who were forced to work in Germany.⁵⁹ This could have contributed to a growing resentment the Britons could have had toward the Romans, but when Trajan came to power, he actually had abandoned Agricola's conquered lands. This suggests that it was not important to Trajan to keep the northern British territory and the threats of the natives were not taken very seriously.⁶⁰

Trajan also built a series of fortifications in Britain during his reign. Along with milecastles, two fortlets were added to the Stanegate at Haltwhistle Burn and Throp, along with another fort at Old Church Brampton around the time of Trajan.⁶¹ This emperor also decided that it was more economically beneficial for the empire to concentrate its energy in the East, and that it was impossible to

⁵⁷ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 115.

⁵⁸ Peter Salway, *The Illustrated History of Roman Britain*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 1993, 127; A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 116.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶⁰ Fulford, "Britain", 563.

⁶¹ Hill, *Construction*, 18.

continue an effective diplomatic policy in northern Britain. Therefore, rather than waste his energy on reinforcing and expanding past the forts, he left the forts to be manned by the auxiliary units, keeping the more powerful legions further south.⁶²

Domitian and Trajan certainly erected the forts in northern Britain for defensive purposes, but this was before Hadrian commissioned the Wall to connect these forts. The Romans did not feel that frontiers limited them in any way. As Vergil put it, they had “*imperium sine fine*”, an empire without limit.⁶³ Frontiers were simply a way to differentiate areas which were under Roman control between areas soon to be under Roman control. They felt that they had a strong enough influence beyond their borders to extend their empire easily whenever they wanted.⁶⁴ To understand the purpose of the Wall, we must examine the man who commissioned the Wall: the emperor Hadrian. His natural cruelty was subdued by his knowledge of what had happened to Domitian, who suffered a similar fate to Julius Caesar.⁶⁵ According to Cassius Dio, “Hadrian’s ambition was insatiable ... but his jealousy of all who excelled in any respect was most terrible and caused the downfall of many.”⁶⁶ A lot more people could have

⁶² Thorsten Opper, *Hadrian: Empire and Conflict*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2008, 77-78.

⁶³ Vergil, *Aeneid*, translated by Theodore C. Williams, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.), 1910, 1.279.

⁶⁴ Hill, *Construction*, 14.

⁶⁵ Sir Ronald Syme, *Emperors and Biography: Studies in the Historia Augusta*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1971, 126.

⁶⁶ Dio, *History*, LXIX.3.3.

experienced Hadrian's wrath, had Hadrian not been conscious of what happened to one of his predecessors.

According to the *Historia Augusta*, Hadrian was a proud man who wanted to show everyone what he knew and of what he was capable.⁶⁷ The buildings he commissioned and had constructed demonstrate his fondness for the arts. This was probably most evident in the architectural structure of his villa in Tivoli, where he named different parts of the villa after famous places he visited as if to boast of his knowledge and travels. Hadrian's villa exhibits the artistic temperament of Hadrian.⁶⁸ It seems that humility was not a strong characteristic of Hadrian when it came to architecture and the arts.

When Hadrian came to power, one of his goals may have been to solidify the entire Roman Empire as a whole, rather than Italy being the major stronghold of the empire.⁶⁹ This would have meant reforming the empire and strengthening the frontier zones. This would also mean that the Roman Empire would shift from its imperial offensive stance, to a more defensive stance, which was completely voluntary.

Hadrian was able to see for himself what the Roman Empire needed in which areas because he was physically there to see the terrain, vegetation and environment surrounding the Roman Empire. It was through these firsthand

⁶⁷ David Magie, trans., *Historia Augusta*, "The Life of Hadrian", Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1960, 14-15.

⁶⁸ Chris Scarre, *Chronicle of the Roman Emperors: The Reign-By-Reign Record of the Rulers of Imperial Rome*, (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc.), 1995, 102.

⁶⁹ Salway, *Illustrated*, 123.

accounts and travels that Hadrian probably realized that the Roman Empire could not continue to expand forever and commissioned the construction of several walls throughout the Roman Empire along the frontiers.⁷⁰ Hadrian might have wanted to define the frontiers with a permanent physical barrier after his personal inspection of the British and German provinces.⁷¹ It is also conceivable that Hadrian dedicated his reign to resurrecting and commissioning new buildings, and then wanted to build walls to encompass his empire. When Hadrian authorized the construction of the Wall to join the forts, the functionality of the forts and wall may well have transitioned from defense to other uses.

To defend the theory that Hadrian built the Wall in Britannia as a symbol of Roman might, we have to look at the many projects that Hadrian commissioned throughout his reign. During Hadrian's reign beginning in AD 117, he commissioned a number of architectural projects throughout the Roman Empire. One of the projects Hadrian started was the construction of the Wall in Britain. When Hadrian came to power, the Roman Empire stretched to the island north of the European continent, but control did not encompass the entire island. Rome only controlled the southern part of the island. Rebellions were a constant problem from the time the Romans first set foot in Britain, but for some reason it was important to keep this territory under Roman rule. According to the *Historia Augusta*, Hadrian went to Britain and "corrected many abuses and was the first to

⁷⁰ Anthony Everitt, *Hadrian and the Triumph of Rome*, (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks), 2009, ix.

⁷¹ Anne Johnson, *Roman Forts of the 1st and 2nd Centuries AD in Britain and the German Provinces*, (New York: St. Martin's Press), 1983, 269.

construct a wall, eighty miles in length, which was to separate the barbarians from the Romans.”⁷² The “barbarian” issues the *Historia Augusta* might have been referring to were the raids and rebellions of Boudicca in AD 61, Venutius in AD 70s, and the Caledonians in AD 79, which all questioned Roman authority, but actually “separating the barbarians from the Romans” can be interpreted in a couple of different ways. In a literal sense, it could have really meant to physically separate the Romans and the Britons, but it could have also meant to use the Wall to Romanize the natives and push out their culture and replace them with the Roman culture.

It is possible that Hadrian’s interest in the arts affected the decisions he made around the Roman Empire. Hadrian seems to have been an emperor who was more interested in building Roman culture through architecture than commanding armies to conquer more land. Hadrian used architecture to make his political points and the Wall was Hadrian’s symbolism of imperial containment.⁷³ Hadrian seems to have been more interested in the arts and culture than he was in increasing the size of the Roman Empire, and he avoided war whenever possible.⁷⁴

Hadrian reinforced the German fortifications on the frontier that Domitian had started with palisades made of timber stakes along the Danube River. This might have detoured any enemy from planning further attack. Hadrian continued

⁷² *HA*, Hadrian, 11.2.

⁷³ Everitt, *Hadrian*, 225.

⁷⁴ Scarre, *Chronicle*, 98.

Trajan's work by commissioning four artificial barriers in the Roman Empire during his reign: in Britain, Germany, North Africa, and Romania. What is interesting about all of these fortifications is that none of these barriers completely covered the border.⁷⁵ This brings up the question of whether they were truly defensive structures because the Romans and indigenous natives could have crossed through the openings and their passage was controlled. Trajan had added milecastles and fortlets to the line, but Hadrian added the palisade. Gateways at every mile on Hadrian's Wall made it possible for traffic to go through the fortification; the palisade in Germania had openings and fortlets alongside them, and the structures in Romania and Africa were fragmented. This all indicates that Hadrian had these walls or barrier structures built for as reason other than completely enclosing his empire.⁷⁶

The *fossatum Africae* in Algeria and Tunisia was constructed during Hadrian's arrival there and shows similarities to Hadrian's Wall. The wall south of the outpost fort of Gemellae, on the edge of the Sahara desert in modern-day Algeria, was almost 40 miles in length and about 6 feet high was made of sun-dried mud bricks, continuing with the emperor's theme of using the native lands' resources to construct his barrier. This wall had a gateway at each Roman mile and a tower midway between each gate almost exactly like the layout of

⁷⁵ Hill, *Construction*, 15.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Hadrian's Wall in Britain. There was also a continuous ditch along the wall, similar to the *vallum* at Hadrian's Wall.⁷⁷

The African frontier did not have just one wall; rather, it had a series of walls. According to a theory put forth by Elizabeth Fentress, the main purpose of the walls in Africa was for Roman legions to manage relations between the population of those on Roman territory and the nomads of the south, who needed to move their herds and flocks to and from summer pastures.⁷⁸ The wall in Gemellae enabled the Roman soldiers to monitor the movement of the nomadic tribes closely to benefit Roman agriculture in Africa by means of taxation and land control.⁷⁹ The gateways were situated every mile and a watchtower halfway between every two gates with ditches positioned in front of this wall, presumably for soldiers to watch and monitor, rather than to keep the tribesmen out. There is also another 28-mile wall east of the Hodna Mountains, in northeastern Algeria, also with towers and fortlets placed at irregular intervals, and also fronted by a ditch. The Roman ruins known as Lambaesis are also located in this area, and a 44-mile wall was located southeast of here.⁸⁰ Another wall almost 90 miles long seems to have enclosed a very important part of the Hodna Mountains with a ditch, forts and towers.⁸¹

⁷⁷ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 209.

⁷⁸ Everitt, *Hadrian*, 272.

⁷⁹ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 210.

⁸⁰ Opper, *Hadrian*, 86.

⁸¹ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 210.

Hadrian made his way to Britain in 122 after commissioning the construction of the Germanic barriers. It was probably then that Hadrian decided to build a physical barrier in the northern frontier. Unlike the Germanic frontier, which was reinforced with simple timber palisades, Hadrian had the barrier in Britain constructed out of stone with regularly-spaced guard posts every Roman mile with two towers between these posts. The wall in Britain was constructed with different materials than in Germania no doubt because Germany had thicker forests, which provided an abundance of wood.⁸² In contrast some areas in Britannia along the wall lacked trees altogether. Hadrian might have already been aware of some of the defensible areas of Britannia as it is possible he had read Tacitus' description of Britain before he got there. Tacitus wrote that "if the valor of our army and the glory of Rome had permitted such a thing, a good place for halting the advance was found in Britain itself", between the Firths of Clota and Bodotria, which produced a narrow neck of land that "the enemy had been pushed into what was virtually another island."⁸³ With this advance knowledge, Hadrian could have focused his energy on other areas that needed to be reinforced or defended. Like the wall in Germany, the Wall in Britain would have been a marker of the end of Roman expansion on the British island, but at the

⁸² A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 128.

⁸³ Tacitus, *Agricola and the Germania*, translated by H. Mattingly, revised by S.A. Handford, (London: Penguin Books), 23; A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 130.

same time it would have provided protection for lands in the north, beyond the Wall with posts at Habitancum (Risingham) and Bremenium (High Rochester).⁸⁴

Hadrian's Wall was his most complicated frontier fortification.⁸⁵ There were numerous fortlets and towers along the road from Falkirk to Perth along the frontier line, known as the Gask Ridge, probably constructed when the Romans first occupied Britain during Agricola's campaign. These forts were the strong points around which Hadrian constructed his wall. Evidence suggests that the land around the area of the Wall already was being cleared during the late Iron Age, and by the time the Romans arrived in the area this process had progressed. There is a good possibility that the Wall ran through areas that already had been largely cleared for arable uses in the east and pastoral uses in the west with light tree cover scattered along the line and denser thickets in the valleys. The western 30 miles of the Wall was constructed in turf, indicating the land was more grassland than it was woodland, making it more useful for agricultural purposes.⁸⁶

The construction of Hadrian's Wall began in the east, and moved westward, with its starting point near Wallsend on the River Tyne. The Wall Path traveled through many small valleys, which no longer exist, having been filled in since the time of the Romans.⁸⁷ Legionaries were assigned to build sections of forty to fifty feet of wall. After each unit completed its section, the legion inscribed

⁸⁴ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 134.

⁸⁵ Hartley and Fitts, *Brigantes*, 24.

⁸⁶ Hill, *Construction*, 17.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

its number or emblem at each end of the section.⁸⁸ This was also done on other frontier barriers across the Roman Empire.

The construction of the Wall began in AD 122 at Hadrian's Bridge along the River Tyne in the east.⁸⁹ The Wall Path has also come to be known as the Stanegate, whose line ran from the Roman Corbridge dig site near the east to a fort near Carlisle in the west. Running next to the River Irthing, about midway along the Wall, near the modern milecastle 40, the Wall is broken due to the rugged characteristics of the terrain, consisting of sheer cliffs on the northern side and a deep-sloped escarpment to the south. This makes a continuous line extremely difficult. The land is rough in this area and dips slightly then rises sharply at Birdoswald, then falls steadily all the way to Carlisle, at which point the Wall follows the estuary of the Solway to Bowness.⁹⁰

Given the fact that Hadrian's Wall was an artificial frontier, its location was a simple choice: It was more practical to use the Tyne-Solway isthmus running about eighty Roman miles, than the Forth-Clyde isthmus, which was shorter, at about forty Roman miles, for a number of reasons.⁹¹ First, the Forth-Clyde isthmus was located within the Scottish lowlands to the north, and building the Wall there would have meant having to reoccupy that region, an extra task for the Roman army. The second reason for choosing the Tyne Solway isthmus was the natural barrier in the central part of the line at the Whin Sill, which has vertical

⁸⁸ Stewart Perowne, *Hadrian*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton), 1960, 88.

⁸⁹ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 131.

⁹⁰ Hill, *Construction*, 16-17.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

cliffs up to 100 feet high in some places, which the Romans incorporated into the Wall. This did not make the line uncrossable since numerous gaps allowed passage through the crags. Nonetheless this location provided an obvious, almost twelve-mile, line to follow from milecastle 34 to just east of milecastle 46 near Carvoran to aid in the directional flow of the construction.⁹²

Hadrian's Wall is made up of four main parts: 1) The Wall itself, usually made of stone with a deep, wide ditch on the north side, 2) Forts, milecastles and turrets which housed the garrisons, 3) The *Vallum*, which was south of the Wall and its posts, and 4) Roads for communication and carriage of stores. All of these elements proceed from one side of the island to the other.⁹³ The Wall was mainly made of stone, some parts also were made of turf; thirty feet broad and fifteen feet high, and it seems as though construction of the Wall had been altered from time to time because its dimensions were not consistent throughout the entire length.⁹⁴

At every mile westward of the bridge, a small guard-post was constructed. These posts were known as milecastles because the distance between each post was one Roman mile. There also were two turrets between each pair of milecastles for signaling. The forts and turrets were built first, and later were

⁹² Hill, *Construction*, 19.

⁹³ J. Collingwood Bruce, *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, (England: Hindson & Andrew Reid Ltd.), 1966, 12.

⁹⁴ Perowne, *Hadrian*, 87.

connected by a stone wall. The outer layers of the Wall were made of cut stone, with a clay and rubble core and mortar was used only for the milecastles.⁹⁵

The eastern half of the Wall was a little stronger than the western half due to the availability of limestone in the east to strengthen it, something the western region lacked.⁹⁶ Along the northern side was a huge thirty feet wide and nine feet deep ditch, which was V-shaped, which would have made it difficult for an attacker to climb out once he had fallen in. The original design of the Wall would have been able to accommodate small patrol soldiers, but it was probably meant to be converted into more of a defensive structure. This would have required the first series of forts that were built along the Wall to be redesigned so that the gates would open to the north, making deploying troops to defend the Wall at a close proximity easier from the south side.⁹⁷ The maintenance of the Wall was already precarious during its beginning stages, so it would be an even bigger challenge to completely try to reconstruct the Wall to become more defensible.⁹⁸ This is a paradox within itself, considering having any opening along a wall or defensive structure would make it vulnerable to penetration from the enemy.

Archeological evidence from the Wall shows multiple forts along the Wall. The largest fort was Stanwix, closest to Carlisle, where the senior most commander on the Wall was stationed. The traffic in this area helped established

⁹⁵ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 132-133.

⁹⁶ Perowne, *Hadrian*, 87.

⁹⁷ Salway, *Illustrated*, 129.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

Carlisle as a great trade city along the Wall.⁹⁹ At least three of the forts on the Wall; Haltonchesters, Chesters, and Greatchesters, were supplied by aqueducts from the north, which suggests that Roman control did not stop at the line of the Wall and that agriculture was probably a part of life in the areas of these forts.¹⁰⁰

About midway along the Wall lies Vindolanda, an auxiliary fort situated just south of the Wall near modern day Bardon Mill.¹⁰¹ The wooden tablets found there have provided historians with a better understanding of Roman life along Hadrian's Wall. Along with Vindolanda, the forts in Carlisle, Nether Denton, Chester, York, and Caerlon were apparently utilized to house soldiers and replenish military supplies until the third century AD when the troops were withdrawn to defend southern Britain and the Balkans from other threats.¹⁰² Vindolanda, Corbridge, Nether Denton, and Carlisle date back to around AD 85, and are all located in close enough proximity that only a short day's march separated these forts.¹⁰³ There was a settlement erected at Chapel Hill, close to Housesteads that presumably came about due to merchants wishing to sell and do business with the soldiers and builders of the fort.¹⁰⁴ There were also three

⁹⁹ Salway, *Illustrated*, 134.

¹⁰⁰ Hill, *Construction*, 19.

¹⁰¹ Robin Birley, *On Hadrian's Wall: Vindolanda: Roman Fort and Settlement*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.), 1977, 24-29.

¹⁰² Oppen, *Hadrian*, 76-77.

¹⁰³ Hill, *Construction*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Lindsay Allason-Jones, "The *Vicus* at Housesteads: A Case Study in Material Culture and Roman Life", *Breaking Down Boundaries: Hadrian's Wall in the 21st Century*, edited by Rob Collins and Matthew Symonds, (Rhode Island: Journal of Archeology, L.L.C.), 2013, 72.

towers at Birdoswald, Mains Riggs, and Barcombe possibly to look out for any impending danger beyond Roman territory.¹⁰⁵

Although Vindolanda was known as a trading fort, some unearthed parts of the fort illustrate to us the physical aesthetics that were present in everyday life on the Wall. The houses at Vindolanda were similar to those at Pompeii with a front shop and rear living quarters, indicating that civilian life was very much bustling and active for a fort along the Wall. It also contained a temple devoted to a Romano-Celtic deity excavated at Vindolanda proving that the Wall-dwellers also worshipped their gods like any normal Roman citizens would in everyday, and they were not confined to military discipline.¹⁰⁶

Fort baths were located in the *vicus* surrounding Vindolanda, indicating that it was very likely that civilian residents were allowed to use them as well as the soldiers.¹⁰⁷ Vindolanda tablet II no. 155 mentions a bathhouse and a hospital,¹⁰⁸ illustrating a relaxed fort community that was extremely well-equipped to conduct normal, everyday activities rather than on-edge soldiers constantly on guard to defend their territory. Soldiers and civilians freely engaged with each other. It seems as if these communities were more for economic symbiosis than to protect a Wall in constant danger of being attacked.

Vindolanda was an area where soldiers and civilians alike traveled to obtain the comforts of everyday life and escape rigorous military life. Tablet II no.

¹⁰⁵ Hill, *Construction*, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Osborn, *Hadrian's*, 67.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Tablet Vindolanda* II no. 155.

180 mentions a shrine for possible temple worship among soldiers and civilians as mentioned previously.¹⁰⁹ Some housing structures at Vindolanda seem as if they were constructed lavishly to appeal to those of high rank, with larger than normal buildings and *opus signinum* floor and walls with painted plaster.¹¹⁰ The ornate characteristics of the houses at Vindolanda suggest that this fort was not geared towards the rough military life, but rather to families and communities with a much more refined taste. The location of Vindolanda provides a majestic view of the land, making it more of a place for entertainment and hunting.¹¹¹ The tablets show that troops were widely dispersed along the Wall and fulfilling roles in various locations, and on occasion different units were housed together in one fort depending in demand.

The forts were used for a number of activities. Retired soldiers settled in the fort at Housesteads, and merchants, craftsmen, and farmworkers made up one of the largest civilian settlements along the Wall.¹¹² The huge bathhouses strewn along many different areas of the Wall tell us that there was a lot of time to relax and enjoy life – a life seemingly opposite of one that would be confined to just maintaining a barrier of the Roman Empire. A large bathhouse at Chesters seemed to be designed in a very elaborate and sophisticated way, and to have

¹⁰⁹ *Tablet Vindolanda* II no. 180.

¹¹⁰ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 135.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹¹² Ronald Embleton and Frank Graham, *Hadrian's Wall in the Days of the Romans*, (New York: Dorset Press), 1984, 130.

had a separate changing room.¹¹³ Multiple compartments in this bathhouse allowed for many people, presumably soldiers and civilians to use. The bathhouse still stands twenty brick courses high today – it was meant to withstand decades, and in this case centuries.¹¹⁴ If these bathhouses had been temporary posts just for soldiers to use, they probably would not have been as durable as they were.

There were even bathhouses beyond the Wall to the north. The fort at Mumrills on the Antonine Wall had such a huge and complex bathhouse, that it seems more likely to have had a more general use, rather than strictly for the commander's household.¹¹⁵ Whether or not these civilians were all Roman, we do not know. It would seem likely, however, that there were a mix of Roman soldiers and the different groups surrounding the Wall socializing with one another in these bathhouses.

In 133, Hadrian appointed P. Mummius Sisenna as governor of the British territory. It was under Sisenna that modifications to certain parts of the Wall were made. The turf wall from the Irthing to the 'Red Rock Fault' was converted to a stone wall, possibly making it better suited to stand up to any sort of attack. The limestone part of the Wall ends in this area and the Wall continues with local red sandstone. During this reconstruction, the Wall was moved forward, so as to

¹¹³ Guy De la Bedoyere, *Hadrian's Wall: History & Guide*, (Gloucestershire, UK: Tempus Publishing Limited), 1998, 59-60.

¹¹⁴ David J. Breeze, *Roman Frontiers in Britain*, (Great Britain: Bristol Classical Press), 2007, 17.

¹¹⁵ Johnson, *Roman Forts*, 134.

encompass the Birdoswald fort, which had previously protruded beyond the Wall. In rebuilding these areas, parts that previously had been difficult to control were reinforced by adding in more forts, either to house more soldiers or for other purposes.¹¹⁶

When Antoninus Pius became emperor in 138, the Romans moved their territory northward in Britain. One of his policies was to reinforce the British frontier. Instead of putting more troops on the existing Hadrian's Wall, he decided to commission a whole new wall to be built, north of Hadrian's Wall, basically establishing more Roman territory beyond the Hadrianic line. Antoninus' Wall was probably completed in 143, and required only sixty percent of the amount of men that was needed to man Hadrian's Wall, but additional forces were required to police the Lowlands and man forts north of the Antonine Wall, wiping out any economic and military reduction.¹¹⁷

When Cn. Julius Verus became governor of the Britannia, in the 150s, he recommissioned Hadrian's Wall, and all but abandoned defending the Antonine frontier, adding to the mystery of the true purpose of Hadrian's Wall.¹¹⁸ The reason for abandonment of the Antonine Wall is unclear, and the dates given by scholars vary between the 150s, 160s, to 170s. It was unlikely that both walls were occupied at the same time at any point. Numismatic evidence indicates a

¹¹⁶ Salway, *Illustrated*, 133.

¹¹⁷ Fulford, "Britain", 565.

¹¹⁸ Salway, *Illustrated*, 148.

great conflict arose in 181, with Roman victory proclaimed through coinage in 184-185.¹¹⁹ The exact location of this conflict and the details remain unclear.

¹¹⁹ Fulford, "Britain", 565.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DEFENSIVE THEORY

The first possible function of Hadrian's Wall discussed in this thesis is defense. This remains the supposedly obvious reason for the construction of the Wall to this day. In fact, it often is still taught in schools today that the sole purpose of the Wall was to protect the Roman Empire. Many scholars, such as Luttwak and Crow still adhere to the defense theory.¹²⁰ The Wall's fortifications seemingly point to defense, and the Wall did have forts and house soldiers indicating that there was a military motivation to its construction. According to Drummond and Nelson, Hadrian's Wall was supposed to be an unbroken line of fortification, constructed as a continuous stone wall that was to be a permanent defensive system in the western frontier, thus marking the end of Roman imperialism, and the beginning of Roman containment.¹²¹ Hadrian had a number of defensive measures put into his wall in Britannia among other frontiers around the empire. For example, he started by incorporating the forts of the Stanegate line to fortify the new frontier.¹²²

¹²⁰ Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century AD to the Third*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 1976; James Crow, "The Northern Frontier of Britain from Trajan to Antoninus Pius," *A Companion to Roman Britain*, edited by Malcolm Todd, (Malden, MA: Blackwell), 2007.

¹²¹ Steven K. Drummond and Lynn H. Nelson, *The Western Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.), 1994, 24-25.

¹²² Johnson, *Forts*, 269.

According to the *Historia Augusta*, Hadrian's Wall was constructed for defense because "the Britons could not be kept under Roman sway."¹²³ The *Historia Augusta* initiated the thought of a growing perception that barbarian threats persisted throughout the Empire requiring fortifications for protection.¹²⁴ The concern about barbarian attacks and raids could have posed a huge problem for the Roman Empire when the issue of protection and containment were on the table. The many mentions of barbarian control in ancient and modern writings could point to a Roman foreign policy that was possibly centered on protection against barbarian invasions on the frontiers during Hadrian's reign. The Legio, IX Hispana, is believed to have been wiped out by the aggressive Britons some time around AD 120.¹²⁵ This would have given Hadrian strong reason to have a defensive wall built to protect his legions and the province's Roman citizens. During the second century, troops on the Wall were mainly stationed there to keep order within their own citizens and against foreign invaders rather than claiming new territory for the Roman Empire.¹²⁶

Hadrian was not only a proud ruler, but he was also a very involved emperor when it came to his empire. Germany and Britain were areas that Hadrian thought were pertinent to visit because he had plans for their frontiers.¹²⁷

¹²³ *HA*, Had., 5.2.

¹²⁴ Hugh Elton, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 1996, 72.

¹²⁵ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 123.

¹²⁶ Salway, *Illustrated*, 134.

¹²⁷ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 113.

He was especially interested in the living conditions of his soldiers, and was a very hands-on ruler:

Hadrian travelled through one province after another, visiting the various regions and cities and inspecting all the garrisons and forts. Some of these he removed to more desirable places, some he abolished, and he also established some new ones. He personally viewed and investigated absolutely everything, not merely the usual appurtenances of camps, such as weapons, engines, trenches, ramparts and palisades, but also the private affairs of every one, but of the men serving in the ranks and of the officers themselves, — their lives, their quarters and their habits, — and he reformed and corrected in many cases practices and arrangements for living that had become too luxurious.¹²⁸

During his reign beginning in AD 121, Hadrian made three extensive trips throughout the Roman Empire to examine the living conditions of his subjects.¹²⁹ Through his travels to observe the lives of the Roman soldiers, Hadrian was able to see firsthand the conditions in which they were living. He even ate outside by the campfire with his soldiers.¹³⁰ His presence among his soldiers encouraged their loyalty to him, but also could have made it possible for Hadrian to understand the needs on the frontiers.¹³¹ Thus, he surveyed the frontiers himself, rather than rely on secondhand accounts from officials. As a result of these observations he had the idea to reinforce the frontier in Germany with palisades, not only for defense, but also to keep his soldiers fit and active because he saw

¹²⁸ Dio, *History*, LXIX, 9.1-2.

¹²⁹ Scarre, *Chronicle*, 101.

¹³⁰ *HA*, Had., 10.2.

¹³¹ Salway, *Illustrated*, 122.

for himself how much downtime the troops really had on the frontier.¹³² Building some sort of a structure would definitely have aided in keeping the soldiers busy by allowing them to have an outlet for expending their energy and to keep them strong in case any conflict were to arise.

Hadrian might have had these walls constructed because he may not have believed that the Roman Empire could continue to expand forever. Therefore he might have wanted to contain the Roman Empire as it was, rather than leaving it open for invasion or further expansion. Hadrian thus would have focused on restoring order in certain parts of the empire and consolidating the frontiers.¹³³ Putting barriers along the frontier zones would theoretically help to contain the empire if that had been his purpose.

The Sixth, Second, and Twentieth legions were employed to the construction of the Hadrian's Wall.¹³⁴ One of the benefits of these barriers was to enhance the ability of the Romans to oversee and control the areas surrounding the walls, and it also decreased the number of soldiers needed to protect the area that was deemed the border of the Roman Empire, in a sense, consolidating the troops.¹³⁵ Patrols manning these wall structures would have been able to control movement into and beyond the walls to a certain degree.¹³⁶ It would be much easier to survey these areas against would-be intruders or attackers with

¹³² A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 117.

¹³³ Salway, *Illustrated*, 122.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹³⁵ Luttwak, *Grand*, 68.

¹³⁶ Salway, *Illustrated*, 128.

some sort of defensive structure. It would also give them time to mobilize in case of an attack.

Luttwak believes that Hadrian was creating separate barriers around the empire to mark the frontier of the Roman Empire. Elton suggests that Hadrian's purpose for setting up the Wall was to divide the Romans from the barbarians, just as many other ancient sources had stated before him.¹³⁷ A French scholar, Troussel, argues that two of Hadrian's Roman frontier fortifications, the Wall in Britain and African *fossatum*, were constructed for the single purpose of keeping the barbarians out.¹³⁸

Hadrian's decision to build the Wall in Britain could have been an effort to establish better frontier control, and also possibly aimed at encouraging a more stable status quo when the Empire was no longer expanding.¹³⁹ The Wall might have been constructed to keep the barbarians at bay as the *Historia Augusta* suggested. In Britain, there seems to have been a psychological concept of separate control in northern Britannia and the area south of Hadrian's Wall, the former being under barbarian rule, and the latter belonged to the Romans.¹⁴⁰

Another possible defensive measure and use of the Wall would have been for it to serve as a communication network, as a message could be relayed from one coast to the other quickly in case there were an attack using fire signals. This

¹³⁷ Elton, *Frontiers*, 113.

¹³⁸ C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1994, 3.

¹³⁹ Brent Sterling, *Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbors?*, (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press), 2009, 64.

¹⁴⁰ Elton, *Frontiers*, 36.

would have given Roman soldiers plenty of time to gather on the Wall if trouble were to come about and to quickly outnumber and or outflank an enemy or intruder, and keep the Roman territory protected.¹⁴¹ Reinforcing troops would have been able to come quickly and aid in an attack. The Wall would also have masked the Roman Empire's vulnerability when troops were needed elsewhere in the Empire, by shielding from the enemy any sort of scrambling the Romans might have had to do or the lack of troops along the border on the Roman side of the Wall.¹⁴²

Perhaps one of the strongest pieces of evidence supporting the theory of defense comes from the construction of the Wall itself. There were certain structures that undoubtedly were used to defend the territory against attack. Some parts of the Wall were reinforced with physical structures to protect against intruders. For instance, parts of the front of the Wall were surrounded by pits with stakes, which suggest a military motivation.¹⁴³ If there were an attack on the Wall, these pits and stakes would have helped to deter intruders. Also, defensive pits in the space between the Wall and the ditch at several locations, would have been used to impede movement, just as barbed wire is used today. These factors suggest that those who had constructed Hadrian's Wall were well prepared for possible intruders crossing the barrier.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Perowne, *Hadrian*, 89.

¹⁴² Sterling, *Fences*, 86.

¹⁴³ Crow, "Northern", 131.

¹⁴⁴ Breeze, *Roman*, 42.

The Wall guarded against external attacks and also provided an operational base from which to launch defensive responses north or south during trouble.¹⁴⁵ The addition of forts along the Wall enabled the maintenance of closer supervision and observation and allowed the garrisons to patrol more efficiently to the North.¹⁴⁶ The forts housed the troops on the Wall who kept a closer eye on the frontier zone, and it placed them close to any perceived conflict prone areas. The forts were also equipped to defend against any intrusion. An example of this is a gate at Vindolanda. A large catapult platform in the north-west angle of the gate at Vindolanda controlled the difficult approach to the northern gate of the fort.¹⁴⁷

The ditch to the north of the Wall, stone curtain wall with turrets, milecastles, and forts, and a larger earthwork to the south suggests the Wall was used for defensive measures not easily penetrable by the enemy.¹⁴⁸ The exact nature of the uses of the *vallum* is not completely clear. The *vallum*, which was situated south of the Wall, could have theoretically also been used as defensive structure. Breeze and Dobson theorize that the *vallum* was used to secure the rear of the Wall.¹⁴⁹ Opper suggests that the *vallum* had been intended to defend a defense the milecastles and the Wall itself before actual completion.¹⁵⁰ Much

¹⁴⁵ Sterling, *Fences*, 96.

¹⁴⁶ Nic Fields, *Hadrian's Wall: AD 122-140*, (Oxford: Osprey), 2003, 37.

¹⁴⁷ R. Birley, *Vindolanda*, 91.

¹⁴⁸ Fields, *Hadrian's*, 4.

¹⁴⁹ David J. Breeze and Brian Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, (Great Britain: Penguin Books, LTD), 1977, 50.

¹⁵⁰ Opper, *Hadrian*, 82.

has been debated about the function of the *vallum*, whether it was constructed for defense or for trade. It could have been used as an insurance measure in trying to keep intruders from going too much further into Roman territory. If the enemy had been able to scale the Wall and get past all of the troops, the *vallum* would have presented an additional challenge for the intruder to try to get through. He would have had to maneuver his way through the *vallum* and past all of the soldiers guarding the Wall and around the surrounding areas.

In looking at the Wall as a defensive structure, the manpower used to guard the Wall should be considered. The estimate of number of men charged with guarding the Wall varies from source to source. According to scholars such as Collingwood, Eric Birley, and Anthony Birley there were anywhere from 15,000 to 19,000 soldiers stationed along the Wall.¹⁵¹ Kightly and Cheze-Brown believe Hadrian's Wall had about 12,000 soldiers at full strength; about a tenth of those men formed the patrolling units while the rest were fighting garrison and cavalry used as fast-moving reinforcements.¹⁵² According to Drummond and Nelson, the northern frontier in Britain was the most heavily garrisoned district of the Roman Empire with 30,000 men.¹⁵³ The numbers of soldiers vary because

¹⁵¹ David Divine, *Hadrian's Wall: A Study of the North-West Frontier of Rome*, (Great Britain: Gambit Inc.), 1969, 173.

¹⁵² Charles Kightly and Peter Cheze-Brown, *Strongholds of the Realm: Defenses in Britain from Prehistory to the Twentieth Century*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.), 1979, 30.

¹⁵³ Steven K. Drummond and Lynn H. Nelson, *The Western Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.), 1994, 25.

the abovementioned historians are relying on interpretation, but what can be agreed upon is that Hadrian's Wall definitely had a strong military presence.

Let us assume that 19,000 men was a generous amount of men to station along the Wall. There were troops that manned the milecastles and turrets on the Wall, indicating that anyone that was able to get through the Wall had another tough challenge in getting past the soldiers that who constantly patrolling the Wall.¹⁵⁴ According to Luttwak via *Die Hilfstruppen*, the front headquarters of Hadrian's Wall had the ability to deploy about 5,500 cavalry in all-cavalry *alae* and possibly 3,000 light cavalry in *cohortes equitatae*, mixed infantry and cavalry units, which was a large number of men for the length of Hadrian's Wall.¹⁵⁵ About 9,500 men were needed to man the forts along the Wall and additional three to four cohorts of infantry auxiliaries were in charge of the milecastles.¹⁵⁶ There were six cavalry units stationed along Hadrian's Wall, and three more beyond to the north.¹⁵⁷ The three forts north of the Wall were used as scout bases to relay important information back to the Wall in case they needed to mobilize an army against impending attacks.¹⁵⁸

Thus, there was no shortage of manpower on the Wall to fight off enemies, nor were there any lack of reinforcements to help the men on the Wall.

¹⁵⁴ Luttwak, *Grand*, 73.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁵⁶ H.H. Scullard, *Roman Britain: Outpost of the Empire*, (London: Thames & Hudson), 1979, 60.

¹⁵⁷ Ronald Embleton and Frank Graham, *Hadrian's Wall in the Days of the Romans*, (New York: Dorset Press), 1984, 2.

¹⁵⁸ Drummond and Nelson, *Western*, 25.

The legionary fortresses at York and Chester were located about one hundred miles south of the Wall, with a special road system that allowed rapid deployment of troops to move north towards the Wall as reinforcements if need be.¹⁵⁹

Considering the number of men stationed on the Wall, it can be assumed that Hadrian took great care into having this structure defended from any potential threats. Auxiliary troops were concentrated near the Wall while two legions were stationed at Chester and York. There were also thousands of cavalry, infantry, and guards stationed around the area to defend it and to stand watch at the Wall. Reinforcements could be called from another 10,000 troops on the Welsh frontier.¹⁶⁰ What is known for sure is that there were soldiers stationed either on Hadrian's Wall or near it, which leads many people to believe the Wall was solely a military structure to defend the Roman Empire from outside attack.

The Wall also housed many soldiers, who actually lived in camps and forts along the Wall. There were garrisons along the Wall with soldiers who were specifically responsible for combat housed in the forts behind the Wall, with the purpose of the patrolling soldiers to move out into the frontier to fight beyond the Wall to stop intruders from breaching Roman territory.¹⁶¹ The soldiers not only lived in forts behind the Wall, but milecastles were used to house the troops that manned the Wall as well.¹⁶² Milecastles also contained barrack blocks on site to

¹⁵⁹ Drummond and Nelson, *Western*, 25.

¹⁶⁰ Luttwak, *Grand*, 73; Drummond and Nelson, *Western*, 25.

¹⁶¹ Bruce, *Handbook*, 25.

¹⁶² Theo Bergstrom, *Hadrian's Wall*, (New York: Jupiter Books Inc.), 1984, 22.

house guards and soldiers.¹⁶³ Living in the milecastles put the soldiers directly on the Wall, giving the troops quick access to any impending dangers or threats. This would have enabled troops to mobilize and defend the areas most needing protection. Like other physical barriers along the Roman frontiers, even the people living beyond the Wall would have been subject to varying degrees of control and influence of the Romans.¹⁶⁴ It could have acted as a control center from which the Roman army marched to either extend their influence further north, or as a base for those who chose to move north to come back to for supplies and other purposes. Luttwak however still believes that anything north of Hadrian's Wall was considered beyond the frontier and the land within the confines of Roman control needed to be protected.¹⁶⁵

There are numerous questions surrounding the function of Hadrian's Wall, but there is no question that the Antonine Wall was specifically designed for defense. The possible reason for the construction of the Antonine Wall was that Antoninus was trying to make a name for himself as the new emperor by consolidating existing frontiers and redefining new frontier arrangements.¹⁶⁶ The structural similarities between Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall suggest that Hadrian's Wall was also used for defense because the Antonine Wall was clearly built to separate and secure the frontier.¹⁶⁷ This suggests that Hadrian's Wall was

¹⁶³ Johnson, *Forts*, 269.

¹⁶⁴ Hill, *Construction*, 19.

¹⁶⁵ Luttwak, *Grand*, 69.

¹⁶⁶ Fulford, "Britain", 565.

¹⁶⁷ Luttwak, *Grand*, 72.

built for the same purpose. In moving his defensive line forward, Antoninus Pius had made some changes to Hadrian's Wall so that it would be more useful for defense. He fortified Hadrian's Wall by removing the gates from the milecastles and by building causeways across the *vallum*, making it easier for soldiers to cross the *vallum* to get to the north side of the Wall.¹⁶⁸ During the late 2nd century, presumably around the time Antoninus Pius came to power, Hadrian's Wall was used to defend against the Picts.¹⁶⁹ When Hadrian's Wall was abandoned, however, it became something less. The Wall was a single instrument of war and without garrisons to man Hadrian's Wall, it was nothing more than an empty shell.¹⁷⁰ All of these factors point to the Wall being a structure to defend the Roman territory. The numerous soldiers stationed on the Wall, along with the forts beyond and to the south of the Wall, provided communication points for reinforcements.

The quote in the *Historia Augusta* that Hadrian was "the first to construct a wall, eighty [Roman] miles long, which was to separate the barbarians from the Romans"¹⁷¹ has been cited by almost all modern works about Hadrian's Wall to either support the theory of defense or to refute it. Identifying a specific incident that initiated the idea of Hadrian's Wall would aid in supporting the theories of whether the Wall was built to somehow either keep out hostilities or to Romanize the rebels, but there seems to be none. There are two main views of Hadrian's

¹⁶⁸ Scullard, *Britain*, 62.

¹⁶⁹ Divine, *Hadrian*, 31.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁷¹ Everitt, *Hadrian*, 222.

Wall: one proposes the Wall was used as a customs checkpoint connecting to the local economy, while the second idea is that the Wall formed a rigid military border.¹⁷² What the Wall possibly did was divide the native British tribes, which was an advantage to the Romans, for it would have weakened the tribes that were threatening the rule of the Roman Empire. It also would have enabled the Romans to trade with natives and other Romans alike without having to worry too much about attacks and defense.¹⁷³

The writing tablets at Vindolanda contain very few references to fighting and campaigning.¹⁷⁴ This could either mean that the Birleys still have a long way to go in digging up more artifacts that may eventually show some sort of conflict, or that there was in fact not much conflict along the Wall. The latter conclusion would counter the argument of defense. At the same time, because there is little to no mention of conflict at Vindolanda does not mean there was actually no conflict that was happening. The absence of evidence does not necessarily mean the absence of conflict, and that is another problem in dealing with ancient sources. Historians may never know for sure. In the end, nothing can be completely accurate when relying on modern interpretations of ancient historical sources.

¹⁷² Rob Collins and Matthew Symonds, "Challenging Preconceptions About Hadrian's Wall", *Breaking Down Boundaries: Hadrian's Wall in the 21st Century*, edited by Rob Collins and Matthew Symonds, (Rhode Island: Journal of Archeology, L.L.C.), 2013, 12.

¹⁷³ Opper, *Hadrian*, 80.

¹⁷⁴ Fulford, "Britain", 563.

The Wall may not have been intended to be just a barrier, but may have had a double function to control movement. The first was to control movement by inhabitants going north and south and the second was to accelerate the movement of the military forces along the east-west axis.¹⁷⁵ In looking at the construction of the Wall as a whole, we see that in some parts it was not fortified completely as a structure for defense. The dimensions changed frequently along the Wall and the rampart walk never exceeded six feet, making it unsuitable as a fighting platform.¹⁷⁶ The series of forts along the Stanegate: Corbridge, Vindolanda, Nether Denton, and Carlisle, which were all within a short day's march of each other, possibly were to house reinforcements for defense, but at the same time, this would have caused more openings in the Wall for potential infiltration.¹⁷⁷

If Hadrian's Wall were indeed built specifically for defense, one would expect extensive measures to have been made to reinforce the Wall against military attacks. Also, the positioning of the gates along the Wall, traffic going through the Wall would have been limited to the gates near the main forts.¹⁷⁸ These would have given the units manning the Wall more control over the flow going in and out of the Wall, and they would have also been more aware of what was passing through the Wall. This also would have limited access to the military

¹⁷⁵ Perowne, *Hadrian*, 87.

¹⁷⁶ Luttwak, *Grand*, 68.

¹⁷⁷ Hill, *Construction*, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Opper, *Hadrian*, 82.

zone where important equipments and supplies were kept, and provided safe camping grounds for troops and units moving along the Wall.¹⁷⁹

In the influential article mentioned above, Collingwood posed several reasons in his lecture as to why the Wall could not have been used as a defensive structure: 1) The Roman Army was offensive, not defensive and usually fought out in the open, as they did when Hadrian's Wall was under attack. They marched beyond the Wall to meet their enemy in the open field; 2) The soldiers lacked the necessary weapons to defend the Wall appropriately; 3) The Wall was not built to defend attacks, having a narrow rampart walk, which did not offer a proper fighting platform; 4) The turrets were more of signaling stations, rather than storage space for artillery; and 5) It is doubtful that there was enough soldiers available to man the Wall adequately for defense.¹⁸⁰

Since Collingwood's piece, coupled with the Birley's excavation of Vindolanda, some historians have postulated that the Wall could not have been built just as a system of defense. Everitt, for example, maintains that the *vallum* could not have been built for defensive measures because it was not topped by a palisade to protect against attacks, thus negating it as a defensive structure.¹⁸¹ If Hadrian's Wall was not the actual border between Roman Britain and northern Britain and Roman culture and civilization continued well beyond the Wall, then what other purposes did the Wall serve for the Romans? Many scholars, such as

¹⁷⁹ Salway, *Illustrated*, 131.

¹⁸⁰ Collingwood, "Purpose", 4-9; David J. Breeze, *The Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, (Great Britain: Pen & Sword Military), 2011, 196.

¹⁸¹ Everitt, *Hadrian*, 224.

David Divine and David J. Breeze, refuting the theory that Hadrian's Wall was strictly a defensive structure, have since cited Collingwood's lecture in their research.

There were multiple openings throughout the entire length of the Wall that allowed for controlled movement. There was a gate about every half-mile along the Wall, allowing people to go through the Wall.¹⁸² In addition to the forts and gateways, two fortlets were added to the Stanegate line at Haltwhistle Burn and Throp.¹⁸³ If Hadrian's intention had been for the Wall to be a defensive structure, the number of forts and fortlets clustered together in one area such as this would have made it very easy for an attacker to penetrate through the Wall with so many possible openings to pass through.

Another argument is the Wall was not designed to be a fighting platform because it had offensive forts to the north that provided intelligence for commanders on the Wall.¹⁸⁴ Even in its early stages, the soldiers on the Wall could have moved beyond it into northern territory and could have brought information from beyond the Wall. What is more, there were outpost forts in the west that proceeded ten miles beyond the Wall at Bewcastle, Netherby, and Birrens, which would have been used for patrols and bases to further extend Roman control and influence.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's*, 37-38.

¹⁸³ Hill, *Construction*, 18.

¹⁸⁴ R. Birley, *Vindolanda*, 16.

¹⁸⁵ Hill, *Construction*, 19.

The frontier barriers in Germania and Africa could have allowed for a degree of control on movement with patrols.¹⁸⁶ If we compare the function of Hadrian's Wall with that of the other frontiers, this would show Hadrian's Wall may not have been fortified completely for defense. It may be that all of the barriers along the different Roman frontiers had some uses other than defense. What does make Hadrian's Wall different from the other Roman frontiers in the empire is that its design was more substantial with an unusually thick curtain wall and a numerous amount of grand gateways and substantial towers, with a unity in design from one end to the other.¹⁸⁷ These gave it more of an aesthetic appeal than the other frontier barriers.

The Wall seems to have been a barrier, not a fighting platform for there were no provisions for directing fire from towers nor was there much space for mounting artillery, nor was there much room to allow for men to pass by one another to bring in reinforcements because the walkway was extremely narrow.¹⁸⁸ If enough reinforcements were called in to defend the Wall, there simply would not have been enough space for all the men to stand on the walkway to keep intruders from breaching the Wall. The parapet sentry walk could not have been used as a fighting platform, only as a lookout to watch the enemy.¹⁸⁹ Eric Birley believes this indicated that the Romans were trying to monitor the Wall as best as possible before any catastrophic event could happen,

¹⁸⁶ Salway, *Illustrated*, 128.

¹⁸⁷ Hill, *Construction*, 19.

¹⁸⁸ Fields, *Hadrian's*, 36-37.

¹⁸⁹ Scullard, *Britain*, 60.

suggesting the Wall was used as a preventive measure instead of a defensive one. Thus, it may be that the Wall was not meant to be a military fortification, but rather as a platform to launch a lateral line of communication across the eighty or so miles across northern Britain.¹⁹⁰

Perhaps one of the biggest arguments against Hadrian's Wall being a strictly defensive structure comes from the way the troops were distributed along the Wall. Roman troops were not placed evenly along the Wall, but rather in a fashion more similar to mobile striking forces that could be deployed to different parts of the Wall for defense at specific locations that were in trouble.¹⁹¹ The entire Wall was not intended to be a completely impenetrable defensive structure. There were only three legions permanently stationed in Britannia at York, Chester and Caerleon.¹⁹² The Second *Augusta* was stationed at Caerleon, the Twentieth *Valeria Victrix* was at Chester, and the Sixth *Victrix* was stationed at York. Being on the frontier, Rome had to use the people on its frontier to man the Wall. Instead of the heavy armor and advanced weapons the Roman legions used, the auxiliary along the Wall used lighter weapons that were native to their respective people.¹⁹³ No more than ten percent of the troops were committed to static defense, which is about the same amount of a mobile field army used for

¹⁹⁰ Eric Birley, *Research on Hadrian's Wall*, (Kendal, UK: Titus Wilson & Son, LTD.), 1961, 270.

¹⁹¹ Luttwak, *Grand*, 72.

¹⁹² Perowne, *Hadrian*, 89.

¹⁹³ Bruce, *Handbook*, 10.

security purposes – not a very big number if defense was the main purpose of the Wall.¹⁹⁴

Collingwood, as well as Eric and Anthony Birley, estimate that about 15,000 soldiers were stationed along Hadrian's Wall. The question is whether that would have been enough men to defend Hadrian's Wall effectively. In theory, this could possibly be a large amount, but hypothetically, if soldiers were distributed evenly among the milecastles, that would equal to about two hundred men per milecastle. Depending on the strength and number of the attackers, two hundred men may or may not have been enough to defend one section of the Wall. If reinforcements were needed, they would have come from surrounding milecastles, but that could have left those particular parts of the Wall vulnerable to attacks if soldiers were to leave to defend another part of the Wall. If there were a planned, calculated attack, it would be hard to keep the enemy from penetrating the Wall.

Collingwood believes that the Wall was created as an obstacle to make it more difficult for smugglers, robbers, and undesirables to get through undetected.¹⁹⁵ According to him, the main worry was not about any huge attack, but the problem of petty thieves loitering around the Wall. Regardless that it would have been extremely difficult even for petty thieves to get past the Wall. Yet, Divine argues that "given a hide rope and a primitive grapnel, or even a stout length of a tree branch to lodge between the crenellations, it would have been

¹⁹⁴ Luttwak, *Grand*, 73.

¹⁹⁵ Collingwood, "Purpose", 4-9; Breeze, *Imperial*, 197.

possible for any active youth to scale it in cloud on the high Wall, in fog on the Lowland stretches, or at night and rain almost anywhere.”¹⁹⁶ The Wall may have merely provided an obstacle for smugglers, making it harder, but not impossible for them to cross over Roman territory.¹⁹⁷ For instance, the Picts were able to breach the Wall four times after its installation in AD 158, 306, 383, and 396.¹⁹⁸ The defense theory suggests that the barbarians were singled out as the particular group that the Wall was suppose to keep out, but they were, in fact, able to get through the Wall not just once, but multiple times. If the Wall was constructed specifically to keep the barbarians out, either the Romans did a poor job in trying to succeed in their purpose, or it really was not their main purpose and goal to keep the barbarians out with this Wall.

Where there were soldiers, there were civilian settlements that arose from the forts with people relying on the money of the troops to thrive.¹⁹⁹ Civilians used the soldiers living on the Wall as an opportunity to benefit themselves economically. Many merchants lived in civilian settlements surrounding the frontier forts to make their living off of the soldiers by way of shops, innkeepers, and prostitutes, who all thrived from the soldiers’ business.²⁰⁰ Not only were the merchants able to prosper around the Wall, soldiers were also making a living

¹⁹⁶ Divine, *Hadrian’s*, 179.

¹⁹⁷ Richard Hingley, *Hadrian’s Wall: A Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2012, 246.

¹⁹⁸ Divine, *Hadrian’s*, 172.

¹⁹⁹ Geraint Osborn, *Hadrian’s Wall and Its People*, (Great Britain: Bristol Phoenix Press), 2006, 65.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

there. There were soldiers working in the tannery and workshops at Vindolanda manufacturing goods for women and children.²⁰¹ The soldiers were probably not only making the goods for their own families, but they were probably also producing the goods in large quantities to trade to other soldiers or do business with the merchants in the area. It seems as if the activities around the Wall had an aura of hustle and bustle just as any town around the empire. As a matter of fact, Carlisle, which was situated along the Wall, was constructed as a civilian town in the first century A.D. and remained so until the end of the Roman period, never changing into a military fort.²⁰²

There probably was very little military conflict around the area considering the relaxed lifestyle that the soldiers lived along the Wall. The legionaries' inscriptions of their legion's mark as a group might have served to strengthen the camaraderie and unity of each legion. Commissioning massive projects could have been a way Hadrian kept his soldiers occupied along the frontier. It could have also served as a purpose to deter thoughts of rebellion from soldiers' minds. For maintaining the loyalty of and the control over these soldiers, who manned the posts on the most distant parts of the empire, would be more difficult than for those nearer Rome itself.

The author of the *Historia Augusta* probably did not record complete fact when he wrote that Hadrian's Wall was used to separate the Romans from the

²⁰¹ R. Birley, *Vindolanda*, 123-125.

²⁰² Peter Salway, *The Frontier People of Roman Britain*, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press), 1993, 39-41.

barbarians, but he was insinuating that assimilating into the Roman culture provided a symbolic civilized refinement that happened around Roman territory not just along Hadrian's Wall, again placing more doubt that the Wall was suppose to be a definitive barrier.²⁰³ De la Bedoyere believes Hadrian's Wall was not meant to be an absolute barrier because there were Roman forts north of the Wall at places such as Bewcastle and Birrens, which indicated that the Romans believed that they had control of areas beyond the Wall, supporting the notion that Roman life continued past the Wall and that the Wall as a structure was not meant to confine the Romans in one area, nor did it exclude interactions with people to the north.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Osborn, *Hadrian's*, 20.

²⁰⁴ De la Bedoyere, *Hadrian's*, 25.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ECONOMIC THEORY

After Collingwood's article, focus on defense as Hadrian's Wall's purpose started to shift to trade. If the Wall was not suitable to be an extensive defensive barrier, then what was it used for? Theoretically, it is very logical to suggest the notion that control of trade was the purpose of the Wall because two of the most important reasons large empires attain their power are through imperial land acquisition and gaining wealth through commerce and trade. Many empires throughout history have grown prosperous due to their control of trade routes because it gave them the power to tax goods in transit. Hadrian's Wall could have had a similar purpose.

The Wall did not mark the Roman frontier in Britain, as Roman culture kept moving beyond the Wall, and so it became a trading outpost in the Roman Empire. The Wall also served as a resting post for the Roman citizens looking to travel past it. Some troops traveled to the Wall when they were on leave from their duty. It was also an area where Roman troops came to replenish their supplies. Some forts along the Wall transformed into community-based centers. Vindolanda, for example, became a major trade center along the Wall, and the population increased in that area. The Wall probably served as small communities where troops would go for leisure and also became homes to many Roman families. Salway believes the presence of soldiers and families

established trading communities, which in turn, stimulated the economy.²⁰⁵

Hadrian's Wall on the Roman-British frontier may have transformed from defense to more of a resting area for soldiers. These static communities may then have transformed into large trading centers. Because the purpose of the Wall had changed, the structure and life along the Wall also would have changed.

The construction of the Wall had begun about one to two years prior to when Hadrian arrived in Britain from the lands of the German frontiers.²⁰⁶

Possibly Hadrian had traveled throughout his empire to scout the areas which he perceived would become prosperous trading zones. He therefore would have had to figure out how to control these areas in order to maximize the profits for the empire. Hadrian would have been able to observe the economic transactions that were being made in his frontier zones and then make his decisions based on what he saw.

Being in a position to tax the goods in German lands was not easy. The difficulty in controlling trade on the German frontier was evident by the number of treaties the empire signed with the tribes in the area because they were constantly raiding the Roman territory.²⁰⁷ In wanting to control the trade in German lands, the Romans had to appease the tribes to keep such conflict at bay. Commissioning a wall to be built in Britannia might have been Hadrian's solution to alleviate similar sorts of problems the Romans had faced in Germania.

²⁰⁵ Salway, *Illustrated*, 134.

²⁰⁶ Hill, *Construction*, 19.

²⁰⁷ Drummond and Nelson, *Western*, 105.

Not only was Germany a key area for trade in the Roman Empire, but during Hadrian's reign, Roman Africa also had an abundance of resources for the Roman Empire to trade. North Africa possessed items such as grain and olive oil, which was extremely important for cooking, lighting, and washing. For example, on the African frontier grains on the Tripolitanian frontier were brought in by the camel and mule loads, and to be able to control the movement of these cash crops and tax the goods would be a huge economic advantage for the Roman Empire.²⁰⁸ The wildlife in Africa also provided meat for Romans.²⁰⁹ It is plausible that Hadrian wanted some sort of structure to organize and control the movement of goods that Africa provided in this region. It was extremely difficult to monitor the agriculture in the region because the nomads were constantly moving their sheep and goats; therefore some solution had to be made to rectify this situation.²¹⁰

If we compare Hadrian's Wall with the *fossatum Africae*, and the African wall structures were analogous to Hadrian's Wall, it is safe to say that the Wall in Britannia also had similar functional purposes dealing with trade. Fentress postulates the purpose of the walls in Africa seem to have served as a sort of customs checkpoint for people to move in and out of the area, rather than to keep Romans from moving beyond the wall, or to keep Saharan Africans from

²⁰⁸ Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 114.

²⁰⁹ Perowne, *Hadrian*, 118.

²¹⁰ Elizabeth W. B. Fentress, *Numidia and the Roman Army: Social, Military and Economic Aspects of the Frontier Zone*, (Oxford: B.A.R. International Series), 1979, 27-28.

coming north.²¹¹ Other areas along the African frontier had no physical barriers at all. It was more important to keep the peace in areas such as Mauretania Tingitana and western Caesariensis and building a wall did not serve this purpose.²¹² If the main purpose of the walls in Africa had been to monitor trade rather than defense, and its construction was also commissioned by Hadrian, the Wall in Britannia very well may have served the same purposes as well.

Hadrian's Wall was a line from which the Romans could launch attacks beyond it. The similarities between the *fossatum Africae* are many, especially in the gates of the walls. Like Hadrian's Wall, the wall in Africa had a gateway at each Roman mile just as Hadrian's Wall had with its milecastles, but because the wall structures in Africa were so discontinuous, they seem to have even less of a defensive purpose than Hadrian's Wall.²¹³ It seems as if the walls in Africa were used more for regulating trade and tax. If the walls in Africa functioned as locations of trade regulation, it is also possible that Hadrian's Wall served the same purpose.

There is evidence of long distance exchange from the remnants of olive oil from Spain, and wine from Gaul, the Rhineland, and Italy in wooden barrels found around the northern British frontier and dating to a period before Hadrian

²¹¹ Fentress, *Numidia*, 112.

²¹² A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 210.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 209.

commissioned his Wall to be built.²¹⁴ This supports the theory that Hadrian was probably seeking a means to control the trade along his frontier zones. Roman merchants passed through the customs checkpoints at the gates along the German and African frontiers to trade and do business with the barbarians and tribesmen from beyond the Wall, as well as presumably with other Roman merchants along Hadrian's Wall. Barbarian attacks did not seem to be a huge concern. Therefore, there seems not to have been much need to defend the frontier zones. Yet, Hadrian probably wanted to find a means to regulate the trade in those areas, for large number of goods were distributed and exchanged across the different Roman frontiers by merchants traveling beyond Roman territory.²¹⁵

Osborn states that there is no evidence that soldiers along the Wall attempted to stop local people from crossing to and from the Wall.²¹⁶ Let us revisit the theory of the Wall being used as a customs checkpoint, and look at other possible uses of the milecastles. The milecastles provided double gates at the front and rear suggesting possible passage through the milecastle from the north to the southern part of the Wall into Roman territory.²¹⁷ The purpose of the Wall may not have been to prevent movement, but to control the movement of

²¹⁴ D.A. Petts, "Overview," "7. Production and Procurement," Coordinated by J. Price and D.A. Petts, *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall, Part of Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site: Volume I: Resource Assessment*, edited by Matthew F.A. Symonds and David J.P. Mason, (Great Britain: County Durham Books), 2009, 120.

²¹⁵ Salway, *Frontier*, 24-25.

²¹⁶ Osborn, *Hadrian's*, 22.

²¹⁷ Johnson, *Forts*, 269.

the civilians passing through the Wall, whether they were merchants, local farmers, or people visiting relatives on either side of the Wall, after paying the guards fees or customs dues.²¹⁸ What the many gateways did was help to control the movement of the people crossing the Wall. The Wall allowed the soldiers to monitor those coming in and out.

Hadrian was likely responsible for the decision to dig the *vallum* and to move the forts onto the line of the Wall.²¹⁹ Many scholars have debated the exact purpose of the *vallum*. As noted above, Breeze and Dobson believe that the *vallum* was used for defensive purposes to secure the rear of the Wall, but as Eric Birley points out, the *vallum* would have actually slowed down the movement of troops if some sort of conflict were to arise. The *vallum* itself consisted of two great banks with an open space of eighty feet between with a twenty by ten feet flat-bottom ditch in the middle as if to corral then funnel the people passing through the Wall. There was a patrol track on the south side of the *vallum*, which connected to the milecastles by causeways over the ditch and gaps of the *vallum* on the north side presumably for soldiers to walk on to monitor the movements of those passing through the *vallum*.²²⁰

The *vallum* was added after the forts were built, and made it easier for the guards to monitor people moving in and out of the Wall since it was only possible

²¹⁸ Breeze and Dobson, *Hadrian's*, 37.

²¹⁹ Hill, *Construction*, 19.

²²⁰ Perowne, *Hadrian*, 87.

to cross the *vallum* at the forts.²²¹ This suggests that the control of movement was at least one of its purposes. Because the *vallum* was only crossable at the forts, it was virtually impossible for people to have passed through the Wall without having to go through Roman guards. The guards, in turn, would have been able to see what goods and how much merchants were bringing in and out of the Wall, possibly for inventory and tax purposes. The *vallum* also would have provided a trackway to move supplies along the Wall. The ditch may have been built primarily for military needs and to mark the military zone and prevent unauthorized approach from the south.²²² This would have allowed the soldiers almost absolute control of the traffic on the Wall. The *vallum* not only protected structures and equipment outside of forts by acting as a fence, but as Salway says, it was also used as a “frontier control zone in which customs and security examinations of large groups, caravans and large herds of animals could be carried out.”²²³ This supports the theory controlling trade.

According to this view, the Wall was meant to be a customs barrier, not a fighting platform.²²⁴ Much has been made of the *vallum* and its potential role in the commerce around Hadrian’s Wall, but in C.E. Stevens’ 1966 lecture, he declared that the *vallum* “would both seal off the garrison from intruders and make it harder for the forced levies who occupied milecastles and turrets to drift back to their homes,” driving the idea that the *vallum* was a customs barrier and

²²¹ Perowne, *Hadrian*, 87.

²²² Scullard, *Britain*, 60-62.

²²³ Salway, *Frontier*, 68.

²²⁴ Fields, *Hadrian's*, 36.

immigration control line regulating the traffic along the frontier, rather than using it as a means for taxing trade.²²⁵ The *vallum* can also be seen as a demarcation line that aided patrols in intercepting trespassers and preventing British spies from moving across the border to their tribesman in the north.²²⁶ This view supports the notion that Hadrian's Wall was a definitive border between those north and south of the Wall.

Roman goods found north of the Wall indicate that the Romans traded with people north of the Wall, which suggests that merchants from the southern part of the Wall crossed to the north and that the northerners beyond the Wall visited settlements south of the Wall to do business with each other.²²⁷ This implies that Hadrian's Wall was not some sort of defensive barrier because people were able to move about the Wall freely.

The Wall enabled the army to control the movement of people, and it also provided a destination point for the army to collect customs taxes, as they did on many frontiers throughout the empire.²²⁸ To be able to control an area where trade was thriving meant reaping the rewards of taxing the trade goods. Those wishing to pass through the Wall would have required Roman approval, which would have allowed the Romans to filter the traffic in the area and to collect tax,

²²⁵ Divine, *Hadrian's*, 147.

²²⁶ Charles Kightly and Peter Cheze-Brown, *Strongholds of the Realm: Defenses in Britain from Prehistory to the Twentieth Century*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.), 1979, 30.

²²⁷ Osborn, *Hadrian's*, 22.

²²⁸ Breeze, *Roman*, 43.

thus benefiting the Roman economy.²²⁹ The Wall might have served as a first-class customs and police barrier for trade beyond the frontier with items such as animal products, which could be taxed by the Romans.²³⁰ Hadrian might well have been aware of the economic benefits of trade with people beyond the imperial frontier and have wanted to regulate the movement across the border by establishing regular gates and trading stations along the frontier. This would have increased contact between both sides of the frontier and also would have helped to expand trade.²³¹

In his book about Roman frontiers, Breeze states that trade did not occur along the British frontier because relatively few artifacts were found north of the Wall. This is not entirely true because artifacts were found in the surrounding areas of the Wall, specifically in Vindolanda. Artifacts at Vindolanda provide us with one of the best illustrations of what life was like along the Wall. The Vindolanda tablets mention merchants and shopkeepers who sold local and imported goods, alcohol, clothes, and footwear to soldiers and to other civilians.²³² There were multiple workshops in the forts along the Wall specializing in a variety of items of trade that most likely provided to more than one fort indicating that there were different transactions happening between different groups along the Wall, not just merchants and soldiers.²³³ Workshops in

²²⁹ Fields, *Frontier*, 46.

²³⁰ R. Birley, *Vindolanda*, 16.

²³¹ Drummond and Nelson, *Western*, 31.

²³² Osborn, *Hadrian's*, 69.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 51.

Vindolanda enabled it to produce its own materials, and what it could not produce it could trade for.²³⁴ Vindolanda was an efficient, self-sustaining fort along the Wall. Any soldier lacking the luxuries of everyday life would surely have been able to find the comforts he was looking for at Vindolanda. Beer, meat, and wool were locally produced at Vindolanda, while vintage wine and wax tablets were exported proving trade did happen along the Wall.²³⁵ Animal remains have been found at Vindolanda indicating the importance of livestock for the people in the area. Animals were probably used for clothing and food, which were probably then traded between the *vicus* and the soldiers.²³⁶ Soil marks show evidence of cultivation at Wallsend, Throckley, Wallhouses, and Carrawburgh and that the Wall ran through areas that were possibly used for arable farming.²³⁷

The Vindolanda tablets mention a man named Gavo several times concerning his responsibility for the inventory of the grains and foodstuff on the frontier.²³⁸ We can hypothesize from this that Gavo was an important man who had to keep track of the resources at Vindolanda. If trade had not been an important factor on the Wall, it would not have been as important to keep record of the amount of supplies and resources that the Romans had. Gavo was probably a businessman who acted as a bridge between merchants and the

²³⁴ Alan K. Bowman, *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier*, (New York: Routledge), 1998, 47.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ R. Birley, *Vindolanda*, 75.

²³⁷ Hill, *Construction*, 17.

²³⁸ *Tablet Vindolanda* II no. 192, Bowman, *Life*, 46.

army soldiers along the Wall, being the middleman informing either side which items were available and how much of them were available.²³⁹

Vindolanda was not the only fort on the Wall that thrived on trade over the Wall. Housesteads became a huge settlement along the Wall due to the prosperity it garnered from encouraged trade throughout the frontier. The gateway at Knag Burn was also in close proximity for merchants passing by.²⁴⁰ Because Housesteads was located so close to a gateway, it became a very important trading center. Its economy thrived and the community eventually grew to foster business and frontier living.

In addition to Vindolanda and Housesteads, Carlisle also benefited from the trade on the Hadrianic frontier. The discovery of wooden objects along the Wall demonstrates the distribution of items throughout the Roman Empire, including barrels made of Silver Fir, indigenous to the hills of Continental Europe, which was used to line the walls of wells at Carlisle. Other items such as medicine containers and combs made of plants from the southern regions of Britain were also found at Carlisle.²⁴¹ Evidence of trade along the Wall was found from non-indigenous seeds excavated from the area. Plants such as coriander and dill were found, along with fruits native to the Mediterranean such as olive,

²³⁹ Bowman, *Life*, 46.

²⁴⁰ Embleton & Graham, *Hadrian's*, 130.

²⁴¹ T. Padley, "Wooden Objects from Hadrian's Wall and how They Relate to Trade," *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall, Part of Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site: Volume I: Resource Assessment*, Edited by Matthew F.A. Symonds and David J.P. Mason, (Great Britain: County Durham Books), 2009, 138.

grapes, and figs. These items are assumed to have been imported as dried fruits to Carlisle because the agriculture around Carlisle did not originally produce these plants.²⁴² What the forts could not produce, they would have imported to allow them to have the luxuries of civilian life on the Wall.

Because of the prosperous economy the Romans experienced along the Wall, *vici* sprouted up outside of the major forts on the Wall. The *vicus* outside of Chesters housed traders, peddlers selling trinkets to soldiers, and merchants who held contracts to supply the garrison benefiting from the trickling down of the economy of the forts.²⁴³ Residents of the *vicus* supplied off-duty soldiers from their open-fronted shops, and farmers also provided produce goods to the passing officers.²⁴⁴ Agricultural production and manufactured goods increased along the frontier to meet the needs of the soldiers, which aided the local economy.²⁴⁵

We know that there was definitely contact between the inhabitants north and south of the Wall through excavated coins and artifacts from both sides.²⁴⁶ This proves that the Wall was not a barrier that cut off contact between the two

²⁴² J. Huntley, "Trade and Import – Evidence From Plant Remains", *Frontiers of Knowledge: A Research Framework for Hadrian's Wall, Part of Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site: Volume I: Resource Assessment*, Edited by Matthew F.A. Symonds and David J.P. Mason, (Great Britain: County Durham Books), 2009, 145.

²⁴³ Fields, *Hadrian's*, 25.

²⁴⁴ Salway, *Frontier*, 24.

²⁴⁵ Drummond and Nelson, *Western*, 139.

²⁴⁶ Fraser Hunter, "The Lives of Roman Objects Beyond the Frontier", *Rome Beyond Its Frontiers: Imports, Attitudes and Practices*, Edited by Peter Salway, (Rhode Island: Journal of Roman Archeology, L.L.C.), 2013, 16.

sides of the Wall. There were a large number of Roman imports north of the Wall at Traprain Law, a Scottish hill fort that produced metal tools and weapons, which indicates the existence of trade beyond the frontier zones.²⁴⁷ The graves of those within and beyond the British frontier contained a mixture of items both manufactured locally, usually pertaining to feasting, and of luxury imports such as bronze basins and silver pails indicating that there was an extensive trade network that took place throughout the whole empire, and it was not limited to the areas within the marked frontier zones.²⁴⁸

Not much is mentioned in ancient and modern sources about the water route that connected the different Roman frontiers from the Black Sea to Hadrian's Wall, allowing sea travelers in boats, ships, and fleets to distribute supplies, maintain communications, and exchange ideas and men.²⁴⁹ This network of trade was massive and it encompassed the whole empire, bringing ideas and cultures to different parts of the empire in addition to material goods. The river and sea traffic between Britain and the upper Rhine frontier were used for trade between the two areas because the permanent stationing of troops created a demand for supplies and materials.²⁵⁰ Those looking to prosper through trade knew to set up life along the frontier zones because those areas

²⁴⁷ Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 125.

²⁴⁸ Peter S. Wells, "Beyond the Frontier in Europe: Roman Imports, Complex Ornaments, and the Formation of New Policies," *Rome Beyond Its Frontiers: Imports, Attitudes and Practices*, edited by Peter Wells, (Rhode Island: Journal of Roman Archeology, L.L.C), 2013, 45-46.

²⁴⁹ Drummond and Nelson, *Western*, 69.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

were where the most business took place. Drummond and Nelson note “The Romans and natives shared a common interest in the pursuit of profit and quickly found advantages of cooperation and integration.”²⁵¹ The Romans needed the cooperation of the natives in order for their economy to thrive. If the walls throughout the empire actually were barriers, they would have blocked this source of wealth.

Milecastles and turrets are often associated with defense, but small fortlets along the Roman frontier on the Danube had inscriptions that explicitly stated that these forts were constructed to be trading posts further implying that the Wall was used as a physical source of economic control.²⁵² The *vallum*, milecastles, turrets, artifacts, and contact beyond the Wall all suggest that forts along the Wall were not intended to be a significant form of defense; but rather, served as control points, which allowed the military units to be able to police a greater area around the Wall.²⁵³ The Wall allowed the Romans to control the traffic of people and goods going in and out of Roman territory, while the forts allowed the control of the northern territory in Britain, and the ability to facilitate mobile units in the south.²⁵⁴ Whittaker notes: “What cannot be doubted is that overall, and on every frontier, there developed increasing social and economic

²⁵¹ Drummond and Nelson, *Western*, 133.

²⁵² Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 121; *CIL* 3.3653: “the *burgus* had the name *commercium* [i.e., trading post] because it was constructed for that purpose”.

²⁵³ Opper, *Hadrian*, 78.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

ties between trans- and cis-frontier populations” that helped the local economy in each area.²⁵⁵

While there is very little evidence refuting the trade theory, nonetheless there remain a few scholars who believe that it was not very plausible for the Romans to have used Hadrian’s Wall as a trading post. Drummond and Nelson point out that some of the area surrounding Hadrian’s Wall was ill-suited for agriculture; therefore, the frontier would have relied heavily on the South for many of its supplies.²⁵⁶ According to this view, the Romans could not have produced many agricultural goods around the Wall area in order to trade, but as mentioned before, some forts on the Wall were supplied by aqueducts in the north. Having aqueducts running water into the land would probably have aided in working the land to make it more fertile to farm on. Drummond and Nelson also believe that there was virtually no trade with the tribes beyond the Wall.²⁵⁷ Breeze supports this argument by adding that there were “relatively few artifacts that are found north of the Wall in any period.”²⁵⁸

Drummond and Nelson also note that the local economy along the Wall was relatively small compared to other towns around the frontier, and it remained “completely devoted to the supply of military markets and the needs of the garrisons along the Wall”.²⁵⁹ They are; however, assuming that the main purpose

²⁵⁵ Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 119.

²⁵⁶ Drummond and Nelson, *Western*, 136.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Breeze, *Roman*, 42.

²⁵⁹ Drummond and Nelson, *Western*, 136

of the *vici* was to support the troops on the Wall, rather than engage in their own trade with other groups, whether it be northern tribes, or other towns beyond or around the Wall. As stated earlier, there was mention of factories in some of the forts, namely Vindolanda, that produced goods that were theoretically exchanged in areas all around the Wall that were not limited to just military goods, but other goods that civilians could have used as well.

Several of the arguments for a solely defensive function for the Wall, which we already have discussed, might be used to counter these arguments for a predominately economic function of the Wall. The suggestion of the strong military presence on the Wall, paints a picture that makes economic transactions along the Wall unlikely due to the dangers. Although Vindolanda might have been a great center for trade along Hadrian's Wall, there still were some significant defensive measures built into that fort. For example, the large catapult platform inside the north-west angle of Vindolanda, indicates that even this fort with many mentions of trade also was prepared for some sort of attack.²⁶⁰ This suggests the Wall was a way for the Romans to establish better frontier control, rather than trade.²⁶¹ The large amount of provisions of the gates allowed for the army to move freely north and south of the Wall to intercept intruders and also to allow reinforcements to mobilize at the danger zones as quickly as possible.²⁶² The milecastles may have served as fortified gateways originally built as

²⁶⁰ R. Birley, *Vindolanda*, 91.

²⁶¹ Sterling, *Fences*, 64.

²⁶² Breeze, *Roman*, 42.

observation posts for supervising crossings in either direction possibly to look out for suspicious characters passing through the Wall.²⁶³

Possibly the initial plan for Hadrian's Wall was that it be used as a customs checkpoint while housing a number of field armies, which could be called upon when needed. Moreover, the Wall was not just a fortification that provided the means of lateral communication to move information along it, for instance the need for aid, but it also functioned as a military base for defensive and offensive measures when necessary.²⁶⁴ If this is so, the first plan of the Wall would have made it easier for the army to adapt to any kind of enemy attack with any combination of forces, making defending the area the main goal and clearly focusing on the army and its defensive strategies, rather than any economic purposes.²⁶⁵ Going back to the issues the Romans had with barbarian control: garrisons and fortifications around the Roman Empire were set up to maintain peace between the Romans and the barbarians, and it also made it easier for the Romans to move into barbarian territory.²⁶⁶ It would seem as though it was more important for the Romans to control the relationship with the barbarians with their frontier barriers, possibly as a precursor to having a civil enough arrangement to where they could then eventually trade with them.

Although there are arguments that the Wall could not have been used for trade, this does not mean that no trade existed along and around the Wall. Those

²⁶³ Fields, *Hadrian's*, 35.

²⁶⁴ E. Birley, *Research*, 269-270.

²⁶⁵ Divine, *Hadrian's*, 182.

²⁶⁶ Elton, *Frontiers*, 37.

who do argue against trade being the primary function, most commonly argue that defense was its primary function. Yet, a plausible theory that combines the two could be that there were soldiers along the Wall monitoring the activities along the Wall, such as the constant flow of people going through the Wall, possibly trading in the area. It is probably more likely that there was some form of trade commerce happening on the Wall than not.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SYMBOLISM THEORY

Hadrian was born into a time when Roman architecture and culture flourished: Vespasian and Titus initiated and completed the construction of the Colosseum, Domitian commissioned extravagant palaces, and Trajan had overseen other projects.²⁶⁷ It is no wonder that these monuments might have influenced Hadrian, and that he had the urge to create his own projects when he became emperor. Whereas Trajan was a more modest ruler and built structures for specific uses, Hadrian focused more on the aesthetics of architecture.²⁶⁸ Hadrian significantly increased the number of construction projects, buildings, and structures in almost every city throughout the Roman Empire.²⁶⁹ There is no reason to doubt the *Historia Augusta's* biography of Hadrian when it states that he:

built public buildings in all places and without number, but he inscribed his own name on none of them except the temple of his father Trajan. At Rome he restored the Pantheon, the Voting-enclosure, the Basilica of Neptune, very many temples, the Forum of Augustus, the Baths of Agrippa, and dedicated all of them in the names of their original builders. Also he constructed the bridge named after himself, a tomb on the banks of the Tiber, and the temple of the Bona Dea. With the aid of the architect Decrianus he raised the Colossus and, keeping it in an upright position, moved it away from the place in which the Temple of Rome is now, though its weight was so vast that he had to furnish for the work as many as twenty-four elephants. This

²⁶⁷ Opper, *Hadrian*, 101.

²⁶⁸ Salway, *Illustrated*, 122.

²⁶⁹ Opper, *Hadrian*, 100.

statue he then consecrated to the Sun, after removing the features of Nero, to whom it had previously been dedicated, and he also planned, with the assistance of the architect Apollodorus, to make a similar one for the Moon.²⁷⁰

Hadrian may have observed that sophisticated architecture had a positive impact on Roman culture. The architecture in the Roman Empire could have served as a reflection of Roman culture as a whole, thereby strengthening the unity of the people.²⁷¹

Hadrian also may have seen the arts and the structures built throughout the Empire as a means to showcase Roman culture. “He constructed theatres and held games as he travelled about from city to city.”²⁷² He was a man who had experience and knowledge of the arts, and put his knowledge on display through the construction of massive structures throughout the empire. He rebuilt a monument dedicated to Pompeii in Egypt and he rebuilt the whole city renaming it Antinous.²⁷³ Hadrian also raised a temple in Jerusalem for Jupiter.²⁷⁴ Many structures that Hadrian commissioned seemed to have a multitude of purposes beyond being mere aesthetic art and the Wall appears to serve a multi-functional purpose.

²⁷⁰ *HA*, Had., 19.9-13.

²⁷¹ Opper, *Hadrian*, 100.

²⁷² Dio, *History*, LXIX, 10.1.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 11.4.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.1.

It is also possible he commissioned these projects to provide jobs for the many jobless and poor Romans.²⁷⁵ Hadrian seems to have been very focused on elevating his dynasty to rival that of the Julio-Claudians and Flavians by erecting massive structures throughout the empire to showcase his power and might. He might have wanted to immortalize himself with the construction of these buildings to illustrate his cultural aptitude and that of his family.

Aelius Aristides demonstrates how important symbolism was to the Roman Empire was in his oration “To Rome”. Aristides, a Roman citizen of Greek descent, lived between 117-181, and had numerous contacts with influential Romans in the imperial court.²⁷⁶ Because of his high born Greek heritage; he knew both Greek and Latin, thus, he was regarded as an elite member in Roman society.²⁷⁷ He was a member of provincial nobility who wrote a speech about Rome in Greek and what it meant to him. In his speech, he professed his loyalty and love of Rome, boasting about its beauty and power as the center of all things. He stated that he “could not vow a speech worthy of the city; it would really call for an additional match so titanic a city.”²⁷⁸ The city of Rome was so great that it “is and will be celebrated by all, but they make her smaller than if

²⁷⁵ Opper, *Hadrian*, 103.

²⁷⁶ W.V. Harris and Brooke Holmes, *Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, Volume 33: Aelius Aristides between Greece, Rome, and the Gods*, (Boston: Brill), 2008, 175.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ Aelius Aristides, “To Rome”, translated by Saul Levin, (Chicago: The Free Press), 1950, 2.

they kept silent.²⁷⁹ Aristides also compared Rome to the Persian Empire and to his own Greek ancestors of the Macedonian Empire, insisting that Rome surpassed both. The Persian rulers were cruel and hence were not able to keep power for long.²⁸⁰ He stated that Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Empire “won the most battles but ruled the least.”²⁸¹ After the death of Alexander the Great, “the Macedonians at once split up into a million pieces,”²⁸² equating to disunity among the Greeks, as opposed to the Roman Empire, where Aristides believed the power and chain of command flowed smoothly. Aristides never once mentions the history of Rome or any historians, except Aeneas, but rather wants to see Rome only as the imperial capital.²⁸³ Aristides essentially propagated Roman ideology in his elaborate speech. He seems to describe Rome as this sort of utopian Empire where it stands above all else. In Rome, “every place is full of gymnasia, fountains, gateways, temples, shops, schools,”²⁸⁴ demonstrating a level of sophistication when it came to Roman architecture. Hadrian’s Wall could have been one of the structures in the Empire that represented Roman power and refinement.

Rome’s series of roads and forts demonstrated, as Hingley put it, their “domination across the landscape of central Britain,” and Hadrian’s Wall

²⁷⁹ Aristides, “To Rome”, 4.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁸³ Harris and Holmes, *Aristides*, 188-189.

²⁸⁴ Aristides, “To Rome”, 97.

contributed to this notion.²⁸⁵ The roads and forts gave the natives an initial impression of the immense power of the Roman Empire, but with the addition of the Wall to connect the forts, it probably made it that much more intimidating to the Britons. Mattern suggests that the Britons would also have found this Wall impressive and terrifying, watching the Roman soldiers putting so much time and effort into this physical structure, which the Romans hoped would aid in deterring any thoughts of attack, or at least make them think twice about planning one.²⁸⁶ Caesar accomplished this during his campaign in Gaul when the Romans erected their defenses quickly “against the town, a mound thrown up, and towers built; the Gauls, amazed by the greatness of the works, such as they had neither seen nor heard of before, and struck also by the dispatch of the Romans, sent ambassadors to Caesar respecting a surrender.”²⁸⁷

Other symbolic features of Hadrian’s Wall relate to how people perceived and interpreted the Wall, which might give us a glimpse of the possible intended purposes of the Wall. In addition to being an aesthetic architectural piece, Hadrian’s Wall might have symbolized multiple things to the Romans and Britons alike. An essential feature of Hadrian’s Wall must have been control.²⁸⁸ Joshua Haskett suggests that rather than using the Wall as a means of separation, it was

²⁸⁵ Hingley, *Hadrian’s*, 30.

²⁸⁶ Susan P. Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1999, 114.

²⁸⁷ Caesar, *Gallic Wars*, 2.12.

²⁸⁸ Breeze, *Roman*, 42.

a way to Romanize the natives, bringing them into the Roman culture under one ruling empire²⁸⁹.

The Wall controlled the frontier in the north and gave the barbarians the impression that a new power had come and staked its claim on their land. To the Romans, it was an example of Roman strength and a signature of the empire. The Romans might thus have used the Wall to display their power to the Britons. The natives would have been impressed to see the engineering skills of the Romans, building this Wall for about ten years.²⁹⁰ Any structure taking a decade to build would seem very impressive and complex. The Wall also served as a warning to any barbarians who intruded into Roman territory that they would be met with harsh punishment. The Romans possibly relied on the impressive nature of the Wall to intimidate the Britons to second-guess any thoughts of an attack without any physical conflict. According to Sterling, erecting a physical barrier and structure such as the Wall also could have been a symbol to intimidate others from attacking the northern front of the Roman Empire, and Hadrian's Wall was used to close the frontier, marking its border and to show that there was no intention to expand, but rather to defend from any foreign invasion.²⁹¹

The Wall might also have provided a "psychological boost" to the Romans in the south. To them, it may have given a sense of security and pride in their

²⁸⁹ Joshua Haskett, "Hadrian's Wall: Romanization on Rome's Northern Frontier," Boise State University Theses and Dissertations, 2009, Paper 65.

²⁹⁰ R. Birley, *Vindolanda*, 16.

²⁹¹ Sterling, *Fences*, 85.

empire.²⁹² The construction of these walls gave the Roman Empire a sort of definitive border. The empire was contained within these walls, and firmly under the control of the Romans. In turn, these borders could be strengthened to solidify Roman territory. The construction of these walls may also have demonstrated to the unconquered people in the North that the Roman Empire was powerful enough to expand and crush those beyond the Wall if it wanted. However, Aulus Hirtius argues that rather than intimidating the natives, the walls could have actually shown Roman “fears; [and] would raise confidence in the barbarians; and when there should be occasion to make a distance excursion to get forage or corn,” the natives would take the opportunity to do so.²⁹³

The actual construction of the Wall could have acted as a way to keep the troops alert and aware of their duties to defend the empire by keeping them engaged in their surroundings and with fellow soldiers. The project of the Wall provided the troops with a physical activity that strengthened their bond with one another. It symbolized Roman discipline and honor. The Wall could have been built merely as a project to keep the Roman army in Britain from getting bored and to toughen them up.²⁹⁴ As mentioned in the introduction, Hadrian made extensive travels throughout the Roman Empire, and he also lived among his soldiers. Hadrian would have been able to see the needs of the army and how much time and effort they had to devote to a massive building project. It is

²⁹² De la Bedoyere, *Hadrian's*, 25.

²⁹³ Aulus Hirtius, Book VIII, *Gallic Wars*, translated by W. A. McDevitte and W.S. Bohn, (New York: Harper & Brothers), 1869, 8.10.

²⁹⁴ De la Bedoyere, *Hadrian's*, 25.

possible that there was no real purpose in Hadrian's mind other than to keep his soldiers occupied, and defense and trade were not part of the original plan.

We can somewhat decipher Hadrian's purpose for the Wall by looking at how he had certain frontier barriers built. For example, the Roman barriers in Germania and Africa did not have a rampart walkway at all. Without a platform for defensive measures, these barriers may have had more of a symbolic nature, rather than a defensive one. They might have been simple markers of the Roman border and the frontier beyond.²⁹⁵ On the other hand, in looking at the construction of the walls in Germania, we can see that Hadrian reinforced these walls with palisades, which does suggest a defensive zone in Germania. The reinforcement of palisades and addition of stakes symbolized a number of things: to the German barbarians, it was a clear border between their land and the Roman Empire, and to the Romans, it could have meant that Hadrian did not intend to expand the Empire beyond what it had become.²⁹⁶

Hadrian did not do the same to the Wall in Britain. Hadrian's Wall was built without palisades, which could have meant it was meant to be less of a defensive structure than a symbolic one. The materials used in Britannia were stronger and made to last longer than the walls in Germania, which could mean that Hadrian wanted the Wall in Britannia to have greater purpose than just simple defense against the bordering native barbarians. The frontier lines might have symbolized physical control around areas surrounding Roman territories, rather than keeping

²⁹⁵ Luttwak, *Grand*, 68.

²⁹⁶ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 116.

the barbarians separated from the Romans. Thus it could have been a symbolism of Roman power and might.²⁹⁷

When originally planning the construction of the Wall, Hadrian's passion for aesthetics and visual appeal may have overruled practical considerations. This explains some elements of the original design of the Wall, for example not providing an offensive striking platform for the troops.²⁹⁸ Hadrian may have not foreseen using the Wall as a defensive mechanism, but rather as a way to show off his knowledge of architecture and building monuments. This is suggested by the superficiality of some parts of the Wall. When completed, the milecastles were rendered with grooved plaster and whitewashed, which would have made them shine in the sunlight and visible for miles.²⁹⁹ This, it seems, would be a sort of architectural boasting of an emperor who had a particular interest in the physical beauty of man-made structures. Part of the Wall was finished by limewashing or rendering, which gave the Wall a smoother look. For practical purposes, the Wall did not need to be so pristine as it were in some areas. As limewashing was a very tedious task, may suggest the work on the Wall as "a symbol of power."³⁰⁰ Effort and care were taken into making parts of the Wall more appealing aesthetically, which allowed the Wall being seen from far away, giving it a symbolic function. Overall, Hadrian's Wall was, as Everitt puts it, a

²⁹⁷ Salway, *Illustrated*, 127.

²⁹⁸ Sterling, *Fences*, 87; Peter Salway, *Short Oxford History of the British Isles: The Roman Era*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 213.

²⁹⁹ A.R. Birley, *Restless*, 133.

³⁰⁰ Hill, *Construction*, 32.

“white ribbon thrown across an empty landscape and the monumental *vallum* were politics as spectacular art.”³⁰¹

The effort in constructing such a massive structure simply for symbolism makes little sense considering all the manpower and effort that would have gone into building these barriers. There must have been other more important reasons for Hadrian to have these barriers built. As mentioned before, the many defensive measures put onto the Wall, gave it a physical function, rather than merely a symbolic one. Also, Hadrian’s Wall appears to be massive and imposing, dominating the landscape and impressive from a distance, but up close, it was not as visibly appealing as other Hadrianic work, like his villa and other huge monuments, like his statue of Antinous.³⁰² The materials used to construct Hadrian’s Wall were not uniform across the entire Wall, and near milecastle 54, it was built of beaten clay, hardly a material for visual appeal.³⁰³ For an emperor who prided himself in his architectural prowess, having an inferior structure to symbolize his reign would seem very unlikely. Details and structures mentioned in previous chapters have discussed in length other uses of the Wall. The presence of some catapults on milecastles and turrets indicate that this Wall was not merely just an object to look at and admire. Artifacts in and around the Wall also suggest that trade was a major factor on the Wall. It is safe

³⁰¹ Everitt, *Hadrian*, 225.

³⁰² Hill, *Construction*, 145.

³⁰³ R.G. Collingwood and Ian Richmond, *Archeology of Roman Britain*, (Great Britain: W & J Mackay & Co. Ltd.), 1930, 77.

to say that Hadrian's Wall as a symbol of Roman power is not the sole reason behind the construction of the Wall, but perhaps an important one.

While Hadrian may well have emphasized containment over expansion, much evidence does suggest the Roman Empire did not cease to increase in size after Hadrian's Wall was built. The Roman army may have been stationed along the Wall to allow further expansion at a later time, possibly so that if there were plans to move Roman territory north of the Wall, they would have been there to patrol the region in case of any attacks from the north.³⁰⁴

One of the differences between Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall was that the latter lacked the *vallum*. Now again, it is not clear the exact purpose of the *vallum*, but let us assume that the *vallum* was, in fact, used to monitor trade. For Antoninus to omit the *vallum*, it can be assumed that trade was not one of his visions when constructing the Antonine Wall. The *vallum* would have slowed down the movement of troops in times of conflict.³⁰⁵ Antoninus was clear that he wanted to fortify his wall as a defensive structure by leaving out the *vallum* and by adding more forts than Hadrian's Wall, and spacing those forts closer together.³⁰⁶ By not having the *vallum* along the Antonine Wall, it would ensure the speed of reinforcements to protect and secure the area.

³⁰⁴ Osborn, *Hadrian's*, 23.

³⁰⁵ E. Birley, *Research*, 270.

³⁰⁶ Salway, *Illustrated*, 142.

The Antonine Wall also housed a larger number of troops than Hadrian's Wall, strong enough to resist any sort of conflict that would arise.³⁰⁷ Given that Hadrian's Wall was longer in length than the Antonine Wall, having more troops on the Antonine Wall meant having a more concentration of manpower. Because constructing a whole new wall demanded the manpower of the existing wall, troops manning Hadrian's Wall had to abandon the Wall and move north to begin work on the new wall. Again, having the troops move northward is a strong indication that there was always some lingering thought that Hadrian's Wall was not the definitive border of the Roman Empire. When the soldiers moved north to man the Antonine Wall, it created an area that was sandwiched between two separate Roman walls. The area between the two walls was very heavily garrisoned, more so than on Hadrian's Wall alone, giving us proof that Antoninus Pius did what Hadrian did not do: He created a definitive defensive barrier in northern Britain.³⁰⁸ In the end, whatever effort Antoninus put into his own wall, it did not last for long.

One could argue that Hadrian's Wall was not really intended to be a defensive barrier because Roman territory and life obviously continued beyond the Wall. Also, Antoninus Pius made it clear that he wanted his wall to be a defensive structure and it contained rigid military characteristics that Hadrian's Wall did not. It is likely that a unification of the northern tribes during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus necessitated a strong Roman force to put down

³⁰⁷ Salway, *Illustrated*, 142.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

the conflict and needed a Roman stronghold in the northern Romano-British territory, north of Hadrian's Wall.³⁰⁹ This may or may not allow for the conclusion that Hadrian's Wall was not used for defense because the conflict lay beyond its proximity and realm, or it can also support the defense theory by allowing troops to be launched from the Wall.

³⁰⁹ Fulford, "Britain", 565.

CONCLUSION

When Hadrian began his reign in 117, he commissioned a number of architectural projects throughout the Roman Empire. One of the projects Hadrian started was the construction of a series of walls around the empire in Africa, Germany, and Britannia. The conventional hypothesis is that the purpose of these walls was to keep out the native tribes from Roman territory. In Britain, the supposed hostiles that the Romans might have wanted to keep out were the Pictish tribes in northern Britannia. At the time of Hadrian's reign, the Romans only controlled the southern portion of the island. The Romans faced a number of rebellions from the native Britons, which had been constant since the beginning of Roman occupation in Britain. In AD 61, it was Boudicca of the Iceni, aligned with the Trinovantes, and ten years later was the rebellion of Venutius and the Carvetii. In 83, Agricola had to sail north of where the Antonine Wall was to put down the Caledonians, and shortly before Hadrian's arrival in Britannia in 118, Falco had to put down a small rebellion from what was believed to be the Brigantes.

When Agricola started his campaign in Britain in AD 77, he had a ditch constructed. This became known as Agricola's Ditch, located south of what would be Hadrian's Wall.³¹⁰ This is an important aspect in supporting the argument that Hadrian's Wall was not the frontier in Roman Britain. When Agricola had this ditch dug, this initial area laid the foundations for the

³¹⁰ W.S. Hanson, *Agricola and the Conquest of the North*, (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books), 1987, 95.

construction of Hadrian's Wall. Agricola's Ditch was the first defense effort of the Romans to ward off the attacks of the native Picts; therefore, the point at which Agricola constructed the ditch was the initial frontier point for the Romans.

As time passed, the Romans moved farther north beyond Agricola's initial boundaries. Eventually, Hadrian's Wall was constructed. As we follow the pattern of the conquest of the British island, it becomes obvious that the intention of the Roman Empire was to continually move north. Agricola's border had been blurred while Roman soldiers moved beyond his boundary, thus eventually creating a new frontier. The same pattern continues with Hadrian's Wall. When the Roman's moved more north passed Agricola's border, a new frontier was established. As Hadrian's Wall became more populated with Roman soldiers, the Romans eventually moved past that wall, therefore again, pushing the Roman frontier more north. Eventually, there was another wall that was constructed north of Hadrian's Wall. The Antonine Wall then became the new frontier in Roman Scotland.

Agricola's Ditch, Hadrian's Wall, and the Antonine Wall were three borders that when put together show the progression of the Roman conquest of Britannia. Had Roman imperialism progressed and had it been able to defeat the native tribes of the north, Roman control would have encompassed the entire island, therefore ridding the frontier in Britain. The walls would have no longer been used for defense had this been a success. Since there was a wall beyond Hadrian's Wall, Hadrian's Wall proved to no longer be the frontier after the

construction of the Antonine Wall. If Hadrian's Wall then no longer delineated the frontier, then defense no longer constituted its primary function. Evidence of civilization and defense that went beyond Hadrian's Wall aids in supporting the purpose of Hadrian's Wall shifting from defense to becoming a something different.

Before Collingwood's article in 1921, it was a general assumption that Hadrian's Wall had been built to keep the northern British tribes from coming into Roman territory, probably stemming from the passage in the *Historia Augusta* about "keeping the barbarians at bay". The steady progression of frontier lines in Roman Britain show that the Romans probably never meant to settle just for the southern portion of Britannia. Ever since Collingwood challenged the notion that Hadrian's Wall was constructed solely for defense, many more historians have written about other possible theories as to why the Wall was built. Out of all the theories, trade and commerce control seem to be the most logical possibilities and have more supporting evidence than other theories. Although the defense argument has demonstrated weaknesses, one should not totally abandon defense as a theory as to why the Wall was built. It is plausible the Wall was constructed as a precautionary measure, with the Romans anticipating possible future rebellion, because conflicts and rebellions against the Romans had occurred multiple times since their occupation of Britain.

Numerous scholarly publications have suggested that the Wall was built as a defensive structure to keep the native Britons to the north out of Roman

territory. Of the three theories discussed in this thesis regarding the purpose of the Wall – defense, trade, and symbolism – the theory that Hadrian’s Wall was built for defense garners the most support; yet ironically, the theories against defense as the primary purpose also receive support. The theory against defense also comes as a package argument with trade as a primary function; this also has strong support. As the conventional hypothesis for the use of Hadrian’s Wall was thought to be defense, this theory became engrained in the minds of many people – scholars and non-historians alike. More recent studies and research demonstrate, however, that the Wall had other uses and purposes and that the Wall could not have been used solely for defense because of its specific lack of defensive reinforcements. In addition, evidence of the contacts and interactions north and south of the Wall, indicate that the Roman Empire did not cease to exist beyond the Wall. Instead, the Wall probably helped push Roman civilization and culture forward and beyond the Wall.

Perhaps the most important theory of the use of the Wall comes from its economic contribution to the Empire. With this theory, we can hypothesize why the Romans built so many milecastles and turrets along the Wall, and what function the *vallum* had. These structures all probably aided in promoting and controlling trade through and along the Wall. Although trade seems the likely function of the Wall, the Wall most probably had multiple purposes. Parts of the Wall were used as defense, and other parts had an aesthetic appeal that represented Hadrian’s interests. The Wall probably started out with the purpose

of defense, but evolved throughout its existence to other functions and uses. It is extremely difficult to pinpoint one particular purpose for which the Wall was used because for every specific theory, another stands to counter it.

For instance, the defense theory is not structurally sound because of the number of openings along the Wall and how easily it was scaled. If we consider the Wall was built around the Carvetii, a possible hostile, anti-Roman sub-group of the Brigantes, the Wall was not used to keep the enemy out, but rather to keep them in. Not much can be said against trade, except that we are unsure if there were materials exchanged north of the Wall. There were definitely resources being exchanged along the entire Wall. If trade and defense were the sole important functions of the Wall, there would not have been much reason to make the Wall aesthetically appealing by limewashing and rendering it, which gave it a shiny look from afar.

To make the argument that Hadrian's Wall was used for one specific purpose is almost impossible because of the lack of evidence to support one purpose and at the same time the amount of evidence against that same purpose. Different parts of Hadrian's Wall exhibited all three elements of functionality, and it is difficult to pinpoint the exact purpose. The Wall probably did not have just one specific function, but served many functions. The most likely theory is that the Wall was probably constructed for defense, but then its uses evolved into other purposes. It would not be correct to say the Wall was only used as a defensive structure because there were so many gates and

openings and some ramparts were not big enough for soldiers to stand on. Trade along the Wall is probable, but lack of definitive items north of the Wall presents questions in this theory. Although Hadrian was a man of the arts and was interested in architecture, it is unlikely that he would have this Wall and other walls around the empire built solely as a symbolic gesture. In the end, one cannot determine the sole purpose of the Wall because we can find sources to support and refute each theory. This investigation strongly suggests that the Wall served as a multifunctional structure.

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