

The RAG

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Spectacular Statue of Septimius Severus

Norah Cooper



This bronze statue of Septimius Severus – emperor from AD 193-211, is one of the finest portraits of the emperor extant today and the only large-scale bronze from antiquity found in Cyprus. It is on display at the Cyprus Museum, Nicosia (Lefkosia).

The emperor is portrayed as an heroic nude with the pose in the style of a Greek mid-fifth century BC statue of a God or athlete rather than in the contemporary Roman style. The relaxed stance, with the slack leg resting only on the toes, is known as *contrapposto*. Other bronze and marble statues of Severus found around the Roman World usually have him either partially draped or in Roman military dress; Severus was an emperor who ensured that there were a variety of recognisable portraits of himself. In this bronze, he has his characteristic tightly curled hair, forked beard and an expression of seriousness. Unlike many extant statues of Severus, this one does not have the imitation forelocks of the Egyptian God Serapis falling vertically over his forehead (known as the *Serapis type*) and which reflected the emperor's North African roots and the influence on him of oriental religions. The position of the hands

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suggests that he may have held objects e.g. a spear and shield. The bronze is cast fully in the round to be placed on a pedestal and viewed from all sides.

In 1928 a farmer who was ploughing his field in Kythrea 10 km NE of Nicosia discovered the larger than life, 2.08m bronze which was in many pieces. When it arrived at the Cyprus Museum, the head and bust were separated from the rest of the body; the legs were fragmented and the feet were missing. Conservation and restoration was undertaken in 1929 by W.A. Stewart of the Harvard-Boston Archaeological mission to Egypt and again in 1940 by the Department of Antiquities staff. The missing parts, like the feet, were remodelled by a Cypriot sculptor. Finally, in 1976, Department of Antiquities staff replaced the steel frame inside the statue (dating from the 1940 restoration) and it was placed on a grey marble pedestal which was found at Kythrea near the spot of the original discovery.

Lucius Septimius Severus Augustus: was born in Lepcis Magna, Tripolitania (Libya) on 11 April 145 and died at York in Britain 4 February 211. In 193 he became the first emperor of African origin. Since the time of the Emperor Augustus (30 BC-AD 14), Lepcis Magna had been a free city with allied status to Rome and Septimius' ancestors became Roman citizens. On becoming emperor, Septimius gave Lepcis status as an honorary Colonia. When he was a senator, he visited the major Roman Provinces and when he became emperor, he moved around the empire particularly in the east: to the Tigris, Egypt, the Rhineland, Africa, the Balkans and finally to Britain where he died.

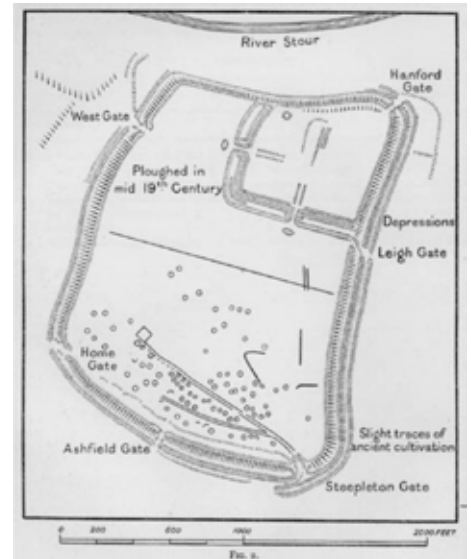
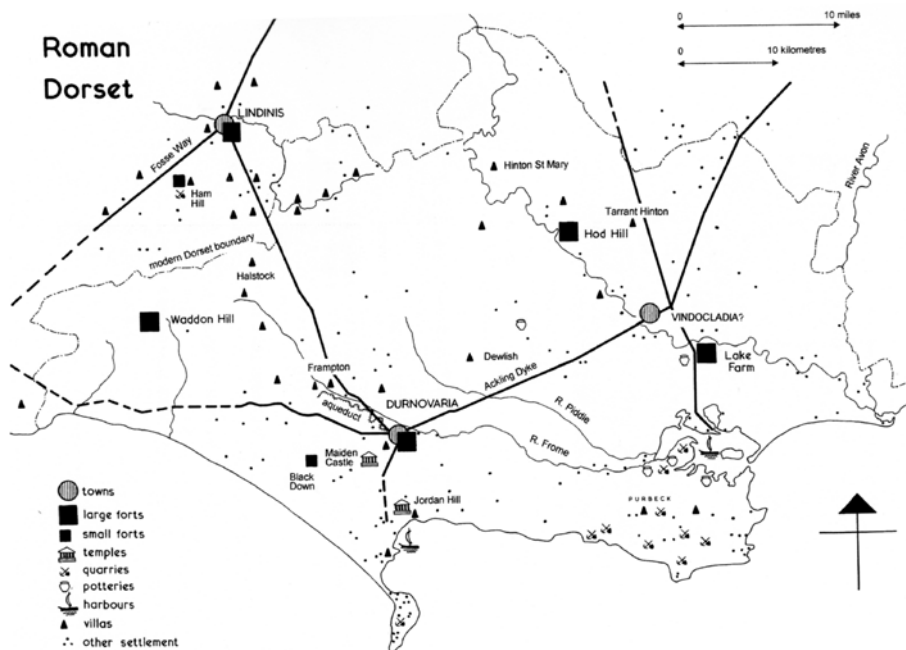
Cyprus was a Roman province from 58 BC (see this issue of *RAG: The Romans in Cyprus*) and there was a great expansion of Roman infrastructure during the Severan Dynasty (AD 193-235) – e.g. the aqueduct from Kythrea to Salamis – which may explain the presence of the bronze in this area.



I would like to thank the Cyprus Museum for special permission to photograph the bronze.

Hillforts in Dorset: Hod Hill and Maiden Castle

Francesca Radcliffe



O.G.S Crawford's interpretation plan of the interior from his 1924 aerial photo of Hod Hill.

There are about 25 Iron Age hillforts in the County of Dorset, in southwest England (see map above). Most of them stand on hilltops, defended by impressive banks and ditches and thus believed to have been built as refuges in time of war by the local population, the Durotriges. Some of these hillforts have been excavated, the most famous of which are Hod Hill and Maiden Castle.

Hod Hill was occupied for a time by the Romans, after the Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54) in AD 43 ordered the second invasion of Britain. (Julius Caesar first crossed from Gaul in BC 55-54). According to the Roman historian Suetonius, it was the future Emperor Vespasian (AD 69-79), at the time commander of the *Legio II Augusta*, who led that unit along the south coast in AD 43-44 fighting 30 battles, conquering two tribes – one presumably, the Durotriges – and capturing more than 20 *oppida* – a term usually interpreted in this context to mean hillforts. The main base of the *Legio II Augusta* is now believed to have been Lake Farm, on the banks of the River Stour, near Wimborne, in East Dorset.

Hod Hill is almost certainly one of the twenty conquered *oppida*. Four miles northwest of Blandford Forum, it is one of the largest Dorset hillforts and one of a series of strongholds along the River Stour. Its ramparts enclose 22 ha in a circuit of 2.4 km. On the north, east and south sides is a massive bank 4.6 m high and an outer ditch 6.1 m deep and 12.2 m wide. Beyond these are a smaller ditch and outer bank. On the western side, the fortification is reduced to a single ditch and bank due to the sheer slope falling steeply to the River Stour. There are six gates/entrances to the hillfort. On the northwest corner of the Iron Age *oppidum* the Romans, after the fierce battle to evict the locals, established their own fort inside the hillfort.

In Hutchins's *History of Dorset*, there is a tantalising, early description of the area of the Roman fort, before ploughing started in the 19th century. In a "*Plan of British and Roman entrenchments on Hod Hill*" Hutchins wrote:

"The whole appears to be formed with the greatest regularity and precision, and the same order seems to have marked out the disposition of the interior. The marks of tents or huts may still be traced at regular intervals, and appear to have been placed in lines facing the front of the camp, three or four deep, with a large open space between them and the entrenchments. Wide level roads intersect the camp from each entrance. There can be but little question as to the origin of this work; every surviving portion answers perfectly to the system of encampments followed by the Romans and so minutely described by Polybius."

An aerial photograph of Hod Hill taken by J.K.S. St Joseph¹ in April 1949, shows the interior of the

¹ S.S. Frere and J.K.S. St Joseph, *Roman Britain From the Air*, 1983, Cambridge: CUP: 88-91



Hod Hill looking north-east. © F. Radcliffe 1995.



Maiden Castle from the west. © F. Radcliffe 1991.

Roman fort in freshly ploughed soil. Soil marks show clearly the street system, the main range of buildings and outline of building plots. This photo was probably seen by Professor Ian Richmond who, between 1951 and 1958, carried out a series of excavations in the Roman fort on behalf of the British Museum. From the wealth of information derived from these extensive excavations and from the finds, it is believed that one of the cohorts of *Legio II*, about 600 men and an auxiliary cavalry unit of about 250 men were stationed in this fort. There was also evidence that the Roman conquest of the fort was successful due to artillery fire, especially concentrated on the area of what could have been a chieftain's hut. The main buildings excavated were: the *Principia* or Headquarters, the houses of the Legionary Centurion and Cavalry Commander, the barracks, a hospital and other minor buildings. None of these buildings are discernible today, not even from the air.

When Crawford, in *Wessex from the Air*, published his aerial photo of Hod Hill taken on 14 July 1924, with his interpretation plan of the whole interior, the only features clearly visible were: the major Iron Age and Roman banks; ditches; the

circular pitting of the Iron Age hut-circles; slighter earthworks inside the Roman fort; and evidence of the damage already caused by ploughing. Coins, pottery sherds and metal objects such as *fibulae*, brooches, soldiers' buckles, *insigna* and other military metal objects were found not only during the 1950s excavations, but also in the 19th century: these are now at the British Museum. The date of these finds shows that the Roman occupation of Hod Hill was short lived, between AD 43-51: the very first years of the Roman conquest. By c.55 the legion had moved its headquarters from Chichester to Exeter: Hod Hill had become redundant.

Maiden Castle, on the other hand, lies south of Dorchester not far from the coast. It is the largest hillfort in Britain. Its great bulk straddles two hilltops, 'a stupendous ruin' in the words of Thomas Hardy 'which may be likened to an enormous many-limbed antediluvian organism lying lifeless and covered with a green cloth, which hides its substance while revealing its contour.' From the air it looks like a dormant giant but it is the size of its defences, entrances and ramparts as one climbs and walks around them, which are most impressive.

Between 1934 and 1937 Sir Mortimer Wheeler² carried out extensive excavations and what he discovered made Maiden Castle one of the most famous hillforts in England. These excavations exposed the long sequel and complexity of the construction of this monument: the history of the occupation of this hilltop was beginning

² R.E.M. Wheeler, *Maiden Castle, Dorset*, Oxford, 1943

to be unravelled. In 1985 further excavations in the south-west corner carried out by the Trust for Wessex Archaeology, sponsored by English Heritage and directed by Niall Sharples added a great deal to our knowledge of the history of Maiden Castle³.

The massive ramparts which so impress today's visitors were built between 400 and 200 BC, in the Middle Iron Age, or phase six of the nine phases of activity/construction. Phase one being the undisturbed hilltop when in the fourth millennium BC it was covered by primeval woodland. The earliest monument is a Neolithic (3000 BC) causewayed camp now completely covered by the ramparts of the Early Iron Age hillfort, at the eastern end of the hill in which the later fort lies. Another monument from the late Neolithic is the east-west aligned Bank Barrow, 545 m long and still clearly visible from the air but barely, as a low bank, on the ground.

In the Middle Iron Age the fort was extended to the size we see today: four ramparts were built on the south side and the eastern and western entrances substantially rebuilt with the addition of interrupted ditches and banks. At the western entrance this resulted in the creation of narrow, complex passageways, overlooked by stone platforms, on which guards stood, and if necessary, defended the entrance. A similar but less complex array of banks and ditches also transformed the eastern entrance from the earlier simpler one. Over 20,000 slingstones, small rounded pebbles from the nearby Chesil Beach, have been found at this eastern entrance. They were stored in large pits ready to be thrown or slung at attackers.

Periodically during the Iron Age the fort was abandoned, while there is evidence that at its peak several hundred people lived here. They would have been busy husbanding cattle, sheep and other animals and cultivating crops of mainly wheat and barley, on an agricultural system of field boundaries, which had its origin in the Bronze Age. Like all hillforts, the interior of Maiden Castle was pock-marked by a vast number of grain storage pits. It was from the examination and study of these pits with the latest archaeological techniques – like radiocarbon dating and analysis of plant and animal remains - that the 1980s excavation has given us most exhaustive answers about dating and interpretation of their function. In particular the puzzling '4-posters' features now believed by some archaeologists to be granaries.

At the eastern entrance of Maiden Castle



Maiden Castle western entrance from south-east.
© F. Radcliffe 1991.



Maiden Castle eastern entrance from northwest.
© F. Radcliffe 1991.



Roman-British temple inside Maiden Castle.
© F. Radcliffe 1991.

³ N. M. Sharples, Maiden Castle, EH, London 1991

Mortimer Wheeler came across a number of skeletons which he believed were the victims of the Romans' final assault, as more than one body bore the traces of Roman weapons, one skeleton had the iron head of a artillery bolt embedded in his vertebrae⁴, hence Wheeler's famous dramatic interpretations of those events. But more recently the re-examination of these skeletons changed this assumption. Out of 52 burials in the cemetery only 14 showed evidence of a violent death. Other bodies were carefully placed in the traditional Iron Age way of laying their dead to rest, with the number and quality of objects in the graves reflecting their status. The evidence for the attack on the hillfort has also been questioned. The traces of burning found by the eastern entrance may be due to iron workings⁵ not burnt houses. Still there is evidence of Roman occupation of the fort following the Roman invasion. A large quantity of Roman *Samian* pottery was found at Maiden Castle and more evidence from the 1980s excavation indicates that the Roman army occupied it, at least temporarily. Only further excavations may answer this question. After AD 70 Dorchester (Roman *Durnovaria*), sited just to the north of the hillfort was developed and at the same time the settlement on Maiden Castle was abandoned. Dorchester became the regional capital of the Durotriges who retained their tribal identity and some independence.

Although abandoned, some activity was still going on inside the redundant huge defences: a Romano British (or Celtic) temple was built after AD 367. The date comes from a hoard of coins found under its mosaic floor. Temples like this one are found on many hillforts in Southern England: they are believed to represent a fusion of Celtic and classical religion. To the north, and very close to the temple, are the foundations of a rectangular two-roomed building believed to have been the priest's house, while to the southwest was a circular building, built on top of a late Iron Age house, which from the quality of the finds is believed to have been a shrine. A pedestal (part of an altar?) found just inside the eastern entrance could have been part of another shrine.

The image of a peaceful and gradual decline of Maiden Castle from a settlement crowded with houses and people, to a place of worship finally reverting to pasture is marred by the discovery of several burials near the temple among which is one of a man who had been brutally hacked to pieces. Originally it was thought it belonged to the Neolithic period, but radiocarbon dating showed it was post-Roman or Saxon.

During the Medieval period Maiden Castle was used as pasture land, followed in the sixteenth centuries by a short period of cultivations but then by the eighteenth century sheep were again grazing on its hilltop.

Today, Maiden Castle is a place full of atmosphere, at times serene when the sun is shining, the larks are singing and sheep grazing, but all this changes dramatically when cold winds and freezing horizontal rain sweep its hilltop.

4 This skeleton can be seen in the Dorset county Museum in Dorchester together with many of the finds from both excavations.

5 Over 63 kg of iron slag were found in this area thought to have been a workshop, producing about 200 kg of iron, solely concerned with secondary forging and welding. N. Sharples 1991, p 118.

Archaeology, memory and heritage: a response to Vaison-la-Romaine *Penny O'Connor*



It was wonderful to read in my parent's copy of RAG magazine about the survival of the largely Roman bridge at Vaison-la-Romaine in the floods of 1992 (*RAG* Vol. 7.1). As a heritage practitioner in Western Australia, I often tell people how well built our older buildings are, and how they can continue to be useful well into the future if they're well maintained.

I think it's fair to say that Roman ruins, and Europe's built heritage more generally, had a great influence on my life. In 1972, when I was seven, I went to Europe for six months with my younger sister



Top left: Penny and her sister in the archway to the medieval town of Vaison-la-Romaine, 1972.

Bottom left: 1st century Roman bridge, Vaison-la-Romaine, 1972.

Right: The medieval town of Vaison-la-Romaine, 1972.



and my parents, RAG members Helen and David Treloar. The enormity of such an adventure was rather lost on me at the time. Europe was a fantasy land defined by the Grimms' Fairy Tales and Norse mythology my father read to me at bedtime – and so impossibly far away as to be almost a dream. Little did I know how much that trip would shape my life.

We arrived in Europe in summer and spent five weeks being guided by Helen and David through churches, abbeys, castles, and Roman ruins in France, Germany and Switzerland. We then moved to London for the rest of our stay and travelled all over England and Scotland investigating as many historic sites as we could find on the Ordnance Survey Maps and in the Blue Guide to Britain.

The differences between a Roman ruin and a medieval ruin were rather lost on me at the time – seven year olds have little comprehension of time and both looked incredibly old. But with the benefit of hindsight I can see that visiting Roman ruins and buildings like those at Vaison-la-Romaine, Orange, Arles and Nimes, and seeing up close structures like the Pont du Gard, which I remember as breathtaking, set down in my mind the beginnings of a pattern language of architectural history. I remember, for example, proudly being able to tell the difference between Doric, Ionic and Corinthian columns.

I never remember feeling bored as we toured around all these historic sites, largely unable to read the brochures or understand the guides. But in many ways there was no reason for me to be bored, because once the basic codes of architecture and design had been explained, the buildings began to tell their own stories in the way their creators had intended, in the application and reinterpretation of classical orders, bas relief and sculpture.

I had been given a little Kodak 'Instamatic' camera to record my travels and the photos I took show the foundations this trip laid down. Almost all the photos I took are of buildings.

We returned to Europe in 1979 and travelled more widely through Europe, this time entering Italy itself, although only in the north. Again, my photos are mostly of buildings. I remember very clearly the vast amphitheatre at Autun because unlike so many other venues it wasn't crowded with tourists. There was a particular stillness about the stones as they lay embedded in the greensward – undecided it seemed about whether to continue to reveal themselves or nestle back into the earth.

The love of buildings and history inspired by my childhood visits to Europe were to define my career. I returned to England as an adult in 1986 and after several years did a Masters of Science in European Urban Conservation at the University of Dundee in Scotland. This wonderful course illuminated the practical challenges of conserving heritage buildings and the different approaches taken around Europe. The students travelled all over Scotland and to Belgium and Holland. I remember vividly the dreich (wet, grey and gloomy)

day our class full of Sassenachs stopped to view Hadrian's Wall – still a bold statement in the landscape.

For my master's thesis, I looked into historic gardens and designed landscapes. That in turn led to a fascinating journey through time with the Garden History Society of Scotland as we studied historic maps to identify gardens going back to the 1500s.

I returned to Perth in 1997 to begin a PhD in cultural heritage at Curtin University, which looked at the challenges of identifying places valued by historic communities. I worked for a time as the Town of Claremont's heritage officer. Since 2003 I've been with the State Heritage Office, and I currently manage the Assessment and Registration Branch.

People still sometimes say to me that Western Australia has no heritage because we don't have Roman ruins, or medieval towns, or Georgian terraces, or Victorian country houses. It's true, we don't have any of these. Each town, city, state and country has its own, unique heritage; the remnants of the history and development of its people. Sometimes there are threads, like the Romans, that link places together, and that creates a wonderful tapestry. But other threads, like mining and gold, are just as important elsewhere, like here in Western Australia. Hopefully the places we choose to protect and conserve today will still be here for my grandchildren so they can decode their mysteries and read their messages.

I've no doubt that the reason the Roman bridge at Vaison-la-Romaine is so well preserved today is because it still serves its original purpose very well. Other ruins however rely on the passion and commitment of organizations like RAG to raise their profile and keep alive our interest.



Maison de Messil, Vaison-la-Romaine, 1972.

The Vindolanda Tablets

Rebecca Norman

The Roman Fort of Vindolanda

Today the ruined fort of Roman Vindolanda, located just south of Hadrian's famous Wall in the north of England, seems to nestle quietly in a landscape, barely changed since the fort's construction nearly two thousand years ago. Although Hadrian's Wall itself was constructed between AD 120 and 130, Vindolanda, had probably been in existence from around AD 79. Initially a timber fort, Vindolanda was one of a network of fortifications protecting the frontier. Each fort was strategically positioned along the line of the Stanegate Road, which linked Corbridge and Carlisle and was built when Agricola, the then governor of Britain, was attempting to expand the limits of the Roman empire. These forts acted as crossing posts, controlling the traffic between the pacified south and unconquered north. Early in Rome's occupation of Britain the troops stationed along the length of this frontier would have been kept busy trying to maintain the fragile stability of the former against any threat from the latter.

The initial occupation of Vindolanda lasted approximately twenty-five years, while the Stanegate Road remained the frontier. Early in the second century AD, when Hadrian ordered the construction of the new stone wall, the original fort at Vindolanda was abandoned and the regiment moved to Housesteads. However, it was not too much later that Vindolanda was re-occupied when during the Antonine period the garrisons withdrew from the Scottish borders, re-settling the frontier along the old Stanegate line. The once deserted fort was rebuilt in stone, on a new north-south alignment, and a vicus was included within the remains of the



Vindolanda Roman Fort. Photo: Vindolanda Trust.

old ramparts, creating a substantial settlement. Yet another phase of construction, in the early third century, enlarged both the fort and its civil settlement, confirming the military importance of Vindolanda's position as a frontier crossing post. Archaeological evidence now verifies that Vindolanda was inhabited for over three hundred years.

Vindolanda was garrisoned by several different units during its existence, the most important being the First Cohort of the Tungrians and the Third and Ninth Cohorts of Batavians, along with a detachment of cavalry from the Spanish *Ala Vardullorum*. These were all auxiliary units serving the Roman Army for up to twenty-five years, who would be granted Roman citizenship on their retirement. None were Britons. This was a policy instituted after a mutiny of these same units in AD 69, which after being subdued, were taken by General Petilius Cerialis, erstwhile commander of the famed Ninth Legion Hispana, to Britain.

The Vindolanda Tablets

Until the discovery of the Vindolanda Tablets, evidence covering the period between Agricola's governorship and the construction of Hadrian's Wall was scant, especially when compared with other periods of Romano-British history. Speculation by historians as to what happened during this phase was reliant on Tacitus' *Agricola* (the only surviving written evidence of the period), some inscriptions, and other general archaeological evidence.

The chance discovery of these incredible texts (which must have appeared at first glance to be rotten rubbish) has illuminated this shadowy episode of Roman occupation (see also *RAG* Vol. 4.4). More than 1300 tablets have been recovered (including fragments), with more still being found. It is worth considering that if the troops had been locals many of the personal letters that were found at Vindolanda may never have been written, as their families and friends would probably have lived close enough to preclude their necessity. Although these tablets detail every day garrison life at Vindolanda when it was a pre-Hadrianic fort, they could just as easily describe garrison life in any province, during any period of the Roman Empire. A small part of what makes their designation as a national treasure justified!

One of the most interesting things about the tablets is their composition. Documents such as these were not uncommon in the Roman world, typically utilising parchment, papyrus, or wax tablets, depending on local materials. Papyrus was not native to Britain, so it, along with parchment and wax tablets, would need to be imported, a costly exercise. Wooden tablets coated with a thin veneer of wax, into which words were scratched using a stylus, were common enough in Roman times and would have been much less complicated



Left: Reconstruction of Vindolanda Fort; Right: Vindolanda Tablet 154: Cohort strength report.

compared with the painstaking preparation of parchment, especially in isolated settlements. Unfortunately, once the wax decomposed, the etched words may well have perished along with it, as it would be unlikely that the stylus would mark the wood underneath. There were about 180 tablets, fashioned in this way, discovered at Vindolanda, along with numerous styli.

Remarkably, the vast majority of these tablets were fashioned from slivers, cut from the pliable sapwood, not the bark, of young trees, between 1 and 3mm thick and about the size of a modern postcard, categorised as leaf tablets to distinguish them from the wax stylus tablets. The surface of the wood had been smoothed to allow the use of ink, by means of a reed pen, similar to the type used on papyrus. The ink was the typical mix of carbon, gum and water. Once completed many leaf tablets were folded protecting the contents and addressed on the outside. Until the discovery of the tablets at Vindolanda, archaeological corroboration of this type of writing medium was negligible, however there is every indication that it was a regularly used resource in the Roman World. Both Herodian and Cassius Dio comment on the use of writing tablets of this nature during the reign of Commodus (Herodian 1.17.1; Dio 72.8.2). Additionally, it must be noted that just because archaeologists at Vindolanda have revealed an abundance of leaf tablets, this does not mean that they were not as prolific elsewhere; many letters had been sent to the garrison at Vindolanda from across the empire, suggesting common use, as recent discoveries at Caerleon and Carlisle attest.

The wood, from which the leaf tablets were made, was locally grown, but investigation has determined that the stylus writing tablets were not; rather they were imported ready made. Scored down the centre to allow easy folding, some leaf tablets also had v-notches and tie-holes so they could be sealed with thread.

Furthermore, for longer missives, several tablets could be tied together producing a concertina effect, remaining foldable for sending and could conceivably be a precursor to a form of notebook or codex. The shape of these tablets also allowed efficient storage, as they could be stacked together, each labelled along its edge for quick retrieval.

Many tablets found were blank, possibly as they had not yet been used, but which could also indicate the use of a particular type of ink now faded, which does not respond to any of the photographic techniques used to enhance faded lettering. Additionally, it was not uncommon in Roman times to use 'invisible' inks such as milk or linseed oil, which required a re-agent to make the writing visible to the addressee (Pliny *NH* 26.62; cp Suet. *Div. Aug.* 89). Some of the tablets show traces of burning, having somehow survived the fire that was supposed to destroy them, some are merely fragments, but all are incredibly valuable for the information they provide to historians, palaeographers and linguists.



Left: Mural from Pompeii of woman with stylus and tablet, thought to depict Sappho. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, Italy.

Above: Tablet and stylus found in Cheikh Fadl, Egypt, ca 600AD. MS608, Schoyen Collection.

The language of the tablets is Latin, but not the capitalised Latin used in ‘literary bookend’ or the formal script used in scholarly works. The Vindolanda tablets are all written in ‘Old Roman Cursive’, the everyday Roman script used during the first three centuries AD. As ‘New Roman Cursive’ replaced the old form around AD 300, the Vindolanda tablets can be dated prior to that time. The Vindolanda tablets were the first texts discovered using this script, initially causing a transcription challenge, which resulted in the creation of a common interpretation method now used on all the tablets.

Missing letters and words as well as fragmented text make this ‘Old Roman Cursive’ difficult to interpret, especially as some letters appear almost identical to others. This makes identification almost impossible, unless virtually the whole document survives. This was highlighted in the case of the personal correspondence, as unlike the official texts, there was no basis for comparison.

The tablets at Vindolanda indicate that a large number of those living at the garrison were familiar with the written language, as numerous different hands have been identified. Moreover, despite some grammatical differences, it is also clear that they used commonly accepted principles as a similar writing style was also used in Egypt, suggesting that this style would be recognisable by any literate soldier throughout the empire.

Finally, these letters were not limited to the high-ranking officers. Subordinate officers also wrote them, right down through the hierarchy and into the lower ranks. They include letters by the women connected with the garrison, traders and even slaves, as well as the people with whom they all corresponded with, indicating that literacy was more prevalent than historians had previously assumed.

The tablets, which have been deciphered, fall quite neatly into two broad categories, accounts and private correspondence and are an assortment of letters and military documents. Significantly the accounts are, at this stage of investigation, the first extant examples of their type dated to the Roman Empire.

The military documents are obviously of great importance because they detail all the day-to-day activities of a soldier in Roman occupied territory. The documents refer to delegated tasks, whether the soldiers would be assigned to workshops, construction, the kilns, manufacture of weaponry, even hospital detail. There are reports concerning inspections, military supplies, administration of justice and requests for leave. Furthermore, there are accounts for the daily distribution and assortment of food, including venison (an extravagance for a military post) and even an inventory of household items. Possibly pertaining to army property, this list could also refer to the personal property of the garrison commander Flavius Cerialis, to whose tenure the items can be dated, but they also represent a typical record of the administration of a military base, anywhere across the Empire.

Some of the tablets shed light on economic activities, especially one letter, from an enterprising gentleman named Octavius to his brother Candidus describing some business issues that can also be linked to other



Vindolanda Tablet 291: Claudia Severa, wife of Flavius Cerialis, inviting her friend to her birthday party. “...a warm invitation to make sure that you come to us...the day will be more enjoyable for me if you are present...”

tablets discovered, due to the names mentioned at the end of the letter. Another tablet deals with the knotty issue of the number of wagons required to transport stone.

However, by far the most interesting tablets are those personal and private letters from across the social strata. The largest collection pertain to Flavius Cerialis, a smaller group belonging to his wife, and a selection related to various soldiers based at Vindolanda from the highest to the lowest ranks. These are the letters that provide a glimpse into the past, breathing life into the people living and working at the frontier of the Empire, their needs, joys, wants and every day concerns. These letters cast new light on a world that until recently remained rather obscure.

These letters have survived due to an incredible set of circumstances and have been carefully conserved, using techniques developed purely for the tablets. They provide previously unknown insights into the lives of military personnel, their families, friends, slaves and merchants, from a period of Romano-British history which until their discovery had volunteered negligible evidence. All the more interesting because they are not dry factual reports, but rather vivid illustrations of the minutiae of day-to-day living. Additionally, the study of the tablets has added to the historian’s knowledge of writing implements and materials, honed conservation techniques and enabled scholars to piece together a far superior body of data. Ultimately, they captured the public’s imagination, to the extent of being voted Britain’s greatest national treasure, an accolade I hope they preserve for a long, long time!

After over twenty years in the work force, Rebecca was persuaded to return to university to pursue her first passion, Roman history. After some hesitation, she is now an undergraduate student at UWA, studying Classics and Ancient History and loving every minute!

Further Reading:

- Birley, A 2002, *Garrison Life at Vindolanda: a band of brothers*, Tempus, Stroud.
- Bowman, A, Thomas, D & Pearce, J 2003, *Vindolanda Tablets Online*, <http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/>
- Bowman, AK 1983, *The Roman Writing Tablets from Vindolanda*, London.
- Bowman, AK 2003, *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier Vindolanda and its People*, London.



Vindolanda Tablet 343.



The Romans in Cyprus

Norah Cooper



“Cyprus is second to none of the islands of the Mediterranean; it is rich in wine and oil, produces grain in abundance and possesses extensive copper mines at Tamassos.” Strabo, *Geog.* (AD23), 14.6.5.

Cyprus, 240 km by 100 km (area 9251 km²), is the third largest island, after Sicily and Sardinia, in the Mediterranean with a current population of just over a million. It is within easy sailing distance of Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt and Athens (Map). Like Malta, a much smaller island (*RAG* Vol. 6.2), it is a Mediterranean island with a rich history of immigration, invasion and colonisation over millennia.

The name *Cyprus* is first mentioned in the 15th century BC Mycenaean Greek as *ku-pi-ri-jo*, meaning “Cypriot”, written in Linear B syllabic script. The classical Greek form of the name is Κύπρος *Kýpros*.

The etymology of the name is unknown but may be from the Greek word for the Mediterranean cypress tree (*Cupressus sempervirens*), *κypáρισσος* (*kypárisσos*); the Greek name of the henna plant (*Lawsonia alba*), *κύπρος* (*kýpros*) or an Eteocypriot (the native language) word for copper. There are huge deposits of copper on the island especially in the Troodos Mountains and during the Roman period the metal was referred to as *aes Cyprium*, “metal of Cyprus”, this was later shortened to *Cuprum* from which we have the name copper.

Cypriots first used copper to make tools around the 4th millennium BC. At that time pure copper could be found on the island’s surface. Later, rich copper-bearing ores were discovered on the north slope of the Troodos Mountains which led to the mining of copper resources in the Bronze Age. Throughout the Roman period, Cyprus was the main supplier of copper to the known world. After the Roman Empire, there was a hiatus in the Cyprus copper mining activity until the 19th century.

Cyprus was not only rich in wheat, timber for ship-building and copper, but had many large, safe harbours. This wealth of natural resources, the safe harbours and its strategic position on the principal maritime route linking Greece and the Aegean with the Levant and Egypt made Cyprus a major asset throughout historic and prehistoric times. The earliest known human activity on the island dates back to around the 10th millennium BC with neolithic archaeological remains. Cyprus was part of the Hittite Empire, then in the second millennium BC it was settled by Mycenaean Greeks followed by Assyrians, Persians, and then the island was seized in 333 BC by Alexander the Great. For several centuries the Macedonian Ptolemaic Pharaohs of Egypt ruled



Map of Cyprus (Murray Jones).



Tomb of Kings. Photo: Norah Cooper.



Mosaic at Paphos. Photo: Norah Cooper.

Cyprus with their capital at Paphos.

Roman involvement in Cypriot affairs began as early as 168 BC, but it was not until 58 BC, that Cyprus was annexed by the Romans who then were a major force in the Eastern Mediterranean. During the Roman civil wars, Julius Caesar (July 100 BC – 15 March 44 BC) gave the island back to Cleopatra VII who became his mistress after the *Battle of the Nile* in 47 BC. In 36 BC this gift was confirmed by Mark Antony, Cleopatra's husband. In September 30 BC, after the *Battle of Actium* (31 BC), Octavian took Alexandria the capital of Egypt; Cleopatra committed suicide and Cyprus once again came under Roman control.

Cyprus was originally incorporated into the province of Syria and in 27 BC it became a Senatorial Province in its own right, ruled by governors of senatorial rank. Paphos once again became Cyprus' capital just as it had been under the Ptolemies since the second century BC.

The Romans exploited the natural resources though the culture of the island remained essentially Greek. Diocletian (284-305) and then Constantine the Great (306-337) reorganised the empire and Cyprus was allocated to the eastern Roman Empire.

Under Roman rule, Cyprus was divided into four main districts, Salamis, Paphos, Amathous, and Lapethos. Paphos was the capital of the island throughout the Roman period until Salamis was re-founded as Constantia in AD 346. The geographer Ptolemy recorded the following Roman cities: Paphos, Salamis, Amathous, Lapethos, Kition, Kourion, Arsinoe, Kyrenia, Chytri, Karpasia, Soli, and Tamassos.

The main cities of Cyprus in the ancient world are sited on the coast with panoramic views of the Mediterranean. One of these, Paphos, in the west of Cyprus, had been the capital under the Ptolemies, who introduced the political and cultural institutions of the Hellenistic world to the island. Near Paphos is the present day site known as *The Tombs of the Kings*, used in both Ptolemaic and then Roman times as a necropolis with underground and rock cut tombs, some built in the Egyptian style. These tombs were for nobles rather than kings.

Roman Cyprus was a key spot for important political and religious functions and Paphos became famous throughout the Roman world because of the temple of Aphrodite at Kouklia, 16 km east of Paphos, where worship of the goddess had been continuous since the late Copper Age.

At Petra tou Romiou (25 km east of Paphos), there are 3 large white limestone rocks (see photograph, title page), known as the Rock of Aphrodite and in Greek mythology, it was here that Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty and fertility emerged from the sea.

Paphos is famous today for the ruins of the classical city and for its Roman mosaics.

Large bronze, hollow-cast statues were produced from the first century BC and a bronze foundry has been found at the Roman house of Dionysius in Paphos which used the abundant copper in Cyprus; bronze is made from copper and tin.

Kourion (19 km west of Limassol) was the site of the famous Sanctuary of Apollo and was a major city for the Ptolemies and then the Romans until, like Paphos, it was destroyed by two earthquakes in the fourth century. This is a huge archaeological site with impressive major Roman ruins.

Amathus, 12 km east of Limassol, and Salamis (now in Turkish Northern Cyprus) were the two other major Roman cities, with temples to Aphrodite and Zeus respectively.

Under the Romans, the island prospered and, apart from the time of the great Jewish revolt in AD 115/6, enjoyed the fruits of the *Pax Romana*. Numerous large-scale public buildings (temples, gymnasia, theatres, baths, and aqueducts) were erected, especially in the Antonine and Severan periods (mid-second to early third century AD). In arts and crafts, Cyprus became fully Romanized in sculpture, ceramics, and glassmaking. Cyprus retained its position as an important link in the main maritime routes across the eastern Mediterranean, and its prosperity declined only when the Arabs disrupted these routes in the seventh century AD.

Cyprus, after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, remained under the rule of the Eastern Roman emperors and their successors, then Arab caliphs for a short period, Crusading Knights Templar, the French Lusignan dynasty, and the Venetians. This was followed by the Ottoman conquest in 1571 and it remained under Ottoman control for over three centuries. Cyprus was placed under British administration in 1878 until it was granted independence in 1960, becoming a member of the Commonwealth the following year. Since 1963 there has been animosity between the Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus culminating in 1983 with the declaration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (not recognised by the UN). As a result of this, tourists planning to visit sites e.g. Salamis from Greek Cyprus should plan in advance as it can be problematical.

I would like to thank Murray Jones for the map of Cyprus, Smadar Gabrieli who was generous with information and advice, and my sister Carolyn Brand, a patient fellow traveller.



Paphos Ruins. Photo: Norah Cooper.



Public Baths, Kourion. Photo: Norah Cooper.



Gladiator's house, Kourion. Photo: Norah Cooper.

RAG News



Guest lecturer Guy de la Bédoyère

Guy is well known for his appearances on British archaeological television shows, including *Time Team*. He is a specialist on the Roman Empire and Roman Britain, and worked as a full-time freelance writer and broadcaster from 1998-2007, reporting on topics as diverse as the Roman Empire, Numismatics and the writings of Samuel Pepys. He will be sharing some of his knowledge on Roman Britain with us this coming Summer Lecture Series.

Easter Sunday, 31 March 2013

Publications

Roman Britain: A New History, Thames & Hudson, 2006.

The Buildings of Roman Britain, Batsford, 1991.

Roman Towns in Britain, Batsford/English Heritage, 1992.

Roman Villas and the Countryside, Batsford/English Heritage, 1993.

Website

Roman Britain "a site with pages about the 367 years that Britain was Britannia" can be found here: <http://www.romanbritain.freemove.co.uk/>.

News from UWA

Congratulations to the following people who have completed the requirements for their post-graduate studies with the Classics and Ancient History Department:

Jean Swanson - Masters (Arts)

"Ancient Maresha and Eleutheropolis (City of the Free)": The impact of change and of Roman occupation on the Cities, the Hinterland and the People

Kevin O'Toole - PhD

The Athenian Basileus to 323 BCE - Myth and Reality

Megan Beasley - PhD

Seriously playful: philosophy in the myths of Ovid's Metamorphoses

Martina Mueller-Zaugg - PhD

Re-creating the past: the accuracy of re-created Roman houses and villas in northwestern Europe and the justifications for their creation

WA Roman Coin Study Group

The WARCSG meets approximately monthly to discuss the coinage of Imperial Rome and to study examples.

Members of RAG who might be interested in joining the WARCSG can obtain further information by contacting the Convener, Walter Bloom, at w.bloom@murdoch.edu.au, or by talking to John McDonald at a future RAG lecture.

Correction RAG 7.1 p.16:

The Don Boyer and RAG Travel Scholarships

Christopher Scibiorski was unable to attend the University of Hawaii Tell Timai Field School, Roman town of Thmuis, Egypt, due to the program's cancellation.

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The RAG Newsletter

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