

The Necessity for Changing Interpretations of the Antonine Wall Due to Postcolonialism

The origins of Roman archaeology are strongly rooted in imperialism and colonialism. Many of the early proponents of the study of Roman antiquities were students of the Grand Tour, who in most cases embraced and admired the nature of empire in the Roman world. British imperialism and colonialism strongly influenced the study of Roman Britain, including that of the Antonine Wall, both in the past and present. However, modern developments in archaeology such as postcolonial theory, coupled with societal and cultural changes globally, has resulted in shifting viewpoints and the need for new approaches and interpretations of past monuments. This paper examines the changing nature of study of the Antonine Wall, caused by postcolonialism and why these developments are necessary and significant, via analysis of past and present scholastic endeavors.

In order to understand how academic investigations into the Antonine Wall have changed, it is important to attend to the origins of the study of Roman Britain and of Roman Archaeology more generally. Scholars including Richard Hingley (2012; 2008; 2000), Lawrence Keppie (2012) and Alan Montgomery (2017) have deeply probed the nature of past studies regarding Roman Britain and the Antonine Wall. From their work, it is understood that the motivations of antiquarians and early archaeologists were strongly rooted in imperialism. The study of Roman Britain and the Antonine Wall itself was a largely British endeavor and many of those working in the field were fond of empire and wanted to harken back to an 'illustrious Roman Empire.' Consequently, the Antonine Wall was viewed as a positive symbol of imperialism and colonialism, as evident in antiquarian choices in language and illustrations. When examining its archaeology and noting the militaristic function, many saw it as a protective

line representing the boarder with barbarism. Views echoing these sentiments regarding the Antonine well are seen well into the twentieth and in some cases the twenty-first century.

The development of postcolonial theory in the late 20th century helped create new and broader interpretations of the Antonine Wall. Academic use of postcolonial theory is both explicit and implicit. In regards to the Antonine Wall, while studies do not always explicitly acknowledge their debt to postcolonialism, there are clear influences. This is exemplified through investigation into how native tribes, such as the Caledonians, viewed and interacted with the fortification, through which contrast between antiquarian and modern studies are seen by the positivity or negativity of word choice and depiction. By researching the perspectives of those who were previously considered the ‘other’ or the ‘barbarian,’ the field is going beyond praising Rome and critiquing it as a colonial oppressor (Montgomery 2017; Keppie 2015; Breeze 2006). From Gardner (Gardner 2013) a new method for assessing the impact of postcolonialism can be derived, as he argues that shifting away from colonial, imperial, and historically Eurocentric viewpoints allows for growth of new modern theoretical takes on the Roman World while also exposing weak points and blind-spots in the field of study. This new method of assessment can thusly be applied to the study of the Antonine Wall.

Finally, the necessity for new interpretations is evident from the shifts in methodology that yields new interpretations of the Antonine Wall. Embracing viewpoints that are embedded with colonialism and imperialism only creates a restricted study of the past, which misses out of numerous elements, as seen when comparing past and modern studies. One of the largest ways postcolonial theory has impacted the study of the Antonine Wall is that it establishes the need for investigations into all those impacted or influenced by it in antiquity. A study only looking from the perspective of the Romans is missing how native populations and travelers would have

viewed the Antonine Wall. Hence, postcolonialism also establishes an element of fairness of interpretation. Lastly, this change in the nature of study allows for the development and application of new approaches including those focused on globalization, post-nationalism, feminism, and creolization, as exemplified through modern scholarship.

Bibliography

- Breeze, David J. 2006. *The Antonine Wall*. Edinburgh: Historic Scotland.
- Gardner, Andrew. 2013. "Thinking about Roman Imperialism: Postcolonialism, Globalisation and Beyond?" *Britannia (Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies)* 44: 1–25.
- Hingley, Richard. 2000. *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen: The Imperial Origins of Roman Archaeology*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- . 2008. *The Recovery of Roman Britain 1586-1906: "A Colony so Fertile."* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2012. *Hadrian's Wall: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Keppie, Lawrence. 2012. *The Antiquarian Rediscovery of the Antonine Wall*. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.
- . 2015. *The Legacy of Rome: Scotland's Roman Remains*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Birlinn.
- Montgomery, Alan. 2017. "Resisting the 'Conquerors of the Universe': Celebrating the Rejection of Ancient Rome in Early-Modern Scotland." *Journal of British Identities* 1: 35–58.