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Roman women in Lowland Scotland

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The Antonine Wall

Papers in honour of Professor Lawrence Keppie

edited by

David J. Breeze and William S. Hanson



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Cover illustrations

Front: The Distance Stone of the Twentieth Legion from Hutcheson Hill (*RIB* III 3507) found in 1969 lying face down in a shallow pit immediately to the south of the Wall (copyright Hunterian, University of Glasgow). **Back:** Restored half-life-sized statue of the Roman god Mars from the annexe of the fort at Balmuildy (*CSIR* 129) (copyright Hunterian, University of Glasgow).

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23. Roman women in Lowland Scotland

Lindsay Allason-Jones, Carol van Driel-Murray and Elizabeth M. Greene

Introduction

Although, over the years, much has been written about Roman Scotland and the Antonine Wall, little attention has been paid to the women who lived in the area during the Roman occupation of Britain. This contribution attempts to address the deficit by exploring all the available archaeological evidence, whether epigraphic or artefactual. Lawrence Keppie will be familiar with most of the ladies discussed here but, hopefully, there will be some surprises for him.

Presented below is the evidence for women living on the Antonine Wall from three different perspectives: inscriptions and sculpture, leather footwear and small finds. This three-pronged approach has allowed an interesting insight into how we use material remains to identify individuals from the past and how very different the picture can be from different types of evidence. Debate has continued for decades about how individuals are identified in the archaeological record and how we correlate artefacts with sex or gender (Allason-Jones 1995; Allison 2006; 2013). What results are three different pictures of the presence of women in the Antonine Wall forts.

The epigraphic and sculptural evidence, discussed below by Lindsay Allason-Jones, reveals a picture of only a few women on the northern frontier, but nonetheless the presence of those women is recorded and a tantalizing glimpse of their social roles is discerned. On the other hand, Carol van Driel-Murray's investigation of the leather footwear from those forts on the Wall that preserve organic remains concludes that the presence of women and children in some abundance is quite clear. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the artefacts discussed by Elizabeth Greene reveal an uncertain picture of the population of the Antonine Wall forts. While there is little artefactual evidence that can be associated with female inhabitants with certainty, other than the footwear, the majority of the small finds are ambiguous and not definitively associated with men either. This investigation provides yet another caveat that the nature of evidence and its appropriateness to answer any question must be assessed carefully during discussions about the women of Roman Scotland.

The epigraphic evidence (LA-J)

To start with the evidence that gives the names of individual women, there are only four inscriptions on stone in Lowland Scotland: two altars and two tombstones. This compares unfavourably with the 27 altars dedicated by individual men and 23 by military units, although four of the altars, possibly five (see Keppie 1998: 57, no. 37), dedicated by men were all paid for by the somewhat obsessive Marcus Cocceius Firmus, the infamous centurion at Auchendavy (*RIB* I 2174-77).

The altar dedicated to Jupiter Best and Greatest of Dolichenus by Magunna at Birrens, to the south of the Wall, indicates that the women living in the area were able to dedicate in their own right (*RIB* I 2099). However, it also hints at the cosmopolitan nature of the inhabitants at that time as Magunna

would appear by her name to be of Celtic origin whilst Jupiter Dolichenus is a deity with eastern origins, often worshipped by army officers who associated his cult with the health and safety of the reigning emperor. It is noticeable that throughout Britain dedications to Jupiter by women invariably equate him with the ancient Hittite sky-god, Dolichenus, although why this should be so is unclear (Allason-Jones 2005: 141).

The altar dedicated by Vibia Pacata, wife of Flavius Verecundus, centurion of the Sixth Legion Victrix at Westerwood, North Lanarkshire, is even more exotic (*RIB* III 3504) (Figure 12.1). This was dedicated to ‘the celestial Silvanae and Quadviviae’. The Silvanae were wood nymphs, particularly favoured in Pannonia, whilst the Quadviviae were the goddesses of crossroads. These deities were usually worshipped as separate groups but were occasionally worshipped in association with each other in Upper Pannonia, the suggested birthplace of Flavius Verecundus (Wright 1968; *CIL* III 4416; see also inscriptions from Carnuntum: *CIL* III 4441, and Vindobona: *CIL* III 13497). According to Birley (1984: 230), ‘the dedication smacks of Pannonia’, citing Domaszewski (1909, 78ff). Moreover, the epithet Caelestis is unusual and to Birley suggested that Vibia Pacata was familiar with the African cult of the Punic Tanit, a deity which was often syncretised with the Roman goddess Juno and given the epithet Caelestis, although Caelestis was occasionally used as the name of the goddess.¹ Wright stated that the centre of the cult of Caelestis was at Carthage and confirmed that both the names Vibia and Pacata can be found in Roman North Africa (1968). Birley speculated whether Vibia Pacata was herself African or if she had been influenced whilst in Lambaesis with her husband when he was posted to the Numidian *Legio III*, although there is limited evidence for this latter suggestion (see also Wright 1968).

In regards to this altar, it is clear that Vibia Pacata was the main dedicator. Hanson and Maxwell (1983: 186) wondered whether the combination of deities implied that Vibia Pacata was pregnant and seeking divine assistance for a successful delivery but, again, there is little supporting evidence. The inscription states that she acted ‘with her family’, although it does not give any clues as to how extensive this family was. It can only be presumed that she was the wife of Flavius Verecundus as she is simply referred to as ‘of Flavius Verecundus’, the word *uxor* not being included in the inscription, leaving us to speculate whether this was a stone mason’s error, if it was felt unnecessary to mention their relationship or if the relationship was not one of wedlock.

The date of the altar is also unclear. The Antonine Wall had a limited period of occupation in the mid-second century AD and it might be presumed that this would provide a tight date of AD 142-162 for the inscription. However, Birley was of the opinion that the lettering suggested a third century date and may have been dedicated when Septimius Severus re-occupied the area very briefly around AD 208 (Birley 1984: 231); Tomlin, on the other hand, was not convinced and was of the opinion that the altar could still ‘easily be Antonine’ (*RIB* III 3504).

At Birrens, a tombstone was set up by Flavia Baetica to her husband Afutianus, son of Bassus, centurion of the Second Cohort of Tungrians (*RIB* I 2115). Although a serving soldier had funds deducted from his pay to cover the cost of his funeral, many soldiers appointed an official heir to oversee the rites and ensure these were carried out according to their wishes; there are a number of examples from Britannia, however, as in this case, where a widow was responsible for the erection of a tombstone

¹ See dedications from Chesters (*RIB* I 1448); Corbridge, where she is linked with Brigantia (*RIB* I 1131); but also from Carvoran, where ‘Caelestis’ is used descriptively (*RIB* I 1791).

(see, for example, *RIB* I 11; 17, 360; 670; 1026 and 1667). Given the restrictions on formal marriage for a serving soldier until the Severan Edict of AD 197, it would have been wise for a soldier to specify that his wife was his heir if he wished her to take responsibility for the funerary rituals, although as centurions were freer to marry (Allason-Jones 1999a), Flavia Baetica may not have needed to be formally mentioned in Afutianus' will. The names of Afutianus and his father indicate that they were not Roman citizens and may have come from Germany or Gaul or may even have been Tungrians from Eastern Belgium, whilst Flavia Baetica's name may imply that she had Spanish origins.

Even less is known of Verecunda, whose tombstone was found around 1728 at Shirva near Auchendavy, as the inscription merely gives her name with no mention of her grieving relatives or her age (*RIB* I 2183; *CSIR* 110) (Figure 27.1). Robertson was of the opinion that Verecunda was the wife of the commanding officer at the fort, or another one close by on the Antonine Wall, possibly Bar Hill, but Keppie dismissed this, as the single cognomen would more likely 'suggest a slave or local girl given a Roman name' (Robertson 1960: 38; Keppie 1998: 115, no. 50). Verecunda was not an uncommon name in Roman Britain, appearing as the name of the actress and girlfriend of the gladiator Lucius at Leicester (*CIL* VII 1335.4) and on the tombstone of a tribeswoman of the Dobunni at Templebrough (*RIB* I 621),² so her name provides no clues as to the antecedents or status of this Verecunda.

The benefit of an inscription on stone is that it is usually possible to be confident that the main person mentioned in the inscription, be it a deceased person or the sponsor of a stone, lived at one time at the site where the inscription was found. Inscriptions on other materials are less conclusive as they could move around independently from the owners, changing hands as the original owner moved on or died or the item was sold or stolen. The following items, therefore, may or may not indicate a woman who lived in Roman Scotland.

Throughout the Roman Empire pottery is the most commonly inscribed object found in excavations. In a military zone, where the range of products available would be limited, it would be a sensible precaution to label one's belongings, if one did not wish them to go astray. At Camelton two fragments of a plain samian bowl (Dragendorff form 31) were inscribed as being 'the property of Aurelia' (*RIB* II.7, 2501.92). This may be the same Aurelia who marked a small fragment of unidentifiable samian found at the same site in the same campaign of excavations (*RIB* II.7, 2501.90). Another fragment of a Dragendorff 31 bowl, found at Birrens in 1895 during excavations of the fort, was scratched below the carination with the letters '....ndida', which has been presumed to refer to a woman named Candida (*RIB* II.7, 2501.118). Two samian sherds, scratched with the name Materna, have also been found recently in the outer fort ditch at Mumrills (Bailey forthcoming, ch. 5). None of these brief mentions of a woman's name provide any clues as to the status or ethnic origins of these women.

More unusually, an amphora rim (Dressel 20) was found in 1981 in an Antonine I demolition layer in Building XI of the fort at Strageath; this was inscribed on the rim in such a way as to be read from the outside edge: IVLIA (*RIB* II.6, 2494.135). Women's names are rarely to be found on amphorae and it is not clear if this inscription indicates that Julia was the amphora's owner and lived at Strageath or if the letters were inscribed at the source of the pot or its contents, or inscribed *en route* by a female merchant or trader.

² Verecunda is expanded from Verecud...; see also Flavius Verecundus at Westerwood (*RIB* II 3504).

A silver cup found at Traprain Law, which was dedicated by Victorina (*RIB* II.2, 2414.23; Curle 1923: 34, no. 24), is another item open to discussion. The letters are scratched on the base rather untidily in three registers, and are clearly an owner's mark but was Victorina ever at Traprain Law? The cup was found in five fragments 'which were all folded flat, but these were successfully opened out and the vessel restored to its original shape' (Curle 1923: 34). This misguided enthusiasm for restorative conservation concealed the fact that the vessel as found might be best described as *Hacksilber*. Recent work on Traprain Law, and on *Hacksilber* in general, has altered our previous ideas about the treasure found at Traprain Law (Hunter and Painter 2013; Blackwell *et al.* 2017). It is now clear that *Hacksilber* was used in uncertain times as a reliable, transferable currency. In the case of the material from Traprain Law, there are several possible methods by which Victorina's cup arrived on the site. Looting has often been seen as the explanation for the presence of *Hacksilber* on a site but this may be considered the least likely reason at Traprain Law. Alternatively, on accession, and on various subsequent occasions, an emperor would be expected to pay his serving soldiers a donative which would usually include one pound of silver; the average soldier would not particularly care what form that silver took, as long as the weight was correct. On the return of soldiers to their native homes at the end of their term of service, this silver would return with them. However, the presence of *Hacksilber* in the Traprain Law Treasure could equally represent the custom of paying diplomatic subsidies. The people at Traprain Law had a long and amiable relationship with Rome and the Treasure may represent recognition of this relationship. Whichever of the reasons outlined above, or a combination of these factors, is the true explanation for the silver cup being found in five pieces on the site, it is unlikely that Victorina was ever at Traprain Law, indeed may never have stepped foot on the island of Britannia.

There are a number of stone sculptures which have no inscription but which depict women. In particular, from Shirva near Auchendavy, there is a tombstone showing a woman in a canopied carriage, a form of transport that may have been used extensively when women were travelling around the province, although, in this case it is more a funerary *trop* (*CSIR* 113). She is wearing an ankle length tunic with a swathed garment, reminiscent of a toga, across her right shoulder, emerging below her left elbow to drape across her hips. Keppie points out that the carriage as shown would not be a practical vehicle and it is unclear if the sculptor intended to portray a two-wheeled *carpentum* or the more usual four-wheeled funerary carriage (1998: 117, no. 53). Another funerary monument from Shirva shows a more common tombstone image, that of a person reclining on a four-legged couch with the statue of a small animal perched on her legs (*CSIR* 112)(Figure 23.1). There is some confusion as to whether this depicts a bearded man or a woman. Keppie in 1998 identified this as a female, considering this and the other tombstone from Shirva to depict 'the same woman, in two poses, reflecting stages in her journey to the afterlife'. He further postulated that the nature of the two monuments would suggest a woman of some substance, such as the wife of a commanding officer or a comfortably-off centurion (1998: 116, no 52; see also p. 67). This is in direct opposition to the opinion given in 1984 that the deceased was 'a bearded male figure' (*CSIR* 112). Such problems of identification are not unknown when the faces of sculptural pieces are damaged (see Hill 1974); the clothing, however, is exactly the same as that worn by the lady in the carriage and breasts are evident on both, so the balance of probability is that the deceased was female.

The stylised head of a woman with her hair arranged in rigid curls from Balmuildy may be a woman or a deity (*CSIR* 133). Several other depictions of women's heads from Scotland are more likely to be intended to portray goddesses rather than human women, such as one from Birrens, which is tentatively identified as Minerva (*CSIR* 10). The head from Burnfoot House, which may have come



Figure 23.1. Funerary monument from Shirva of a person reclining on a four-legged couch with the statue of a small animal perched on her legs (CSIR 112) (© Hunterian, University of Glasgow).

originally from Birrens, has the woman's hair completely contained within a close-fitting cap which is drawn into two wings on either side of her head by two bands or 'fillets', like a 1920's cloche. This head is very stylised but may portray a human woman, albeit one from one of the Continental tribes, such as the Ubi or the Treveri, who favoured bonnets; there is little evidence to suggest that the native women or the native deities of Britain wore such caps (Allason-Jones 2005: 109).

This paucity of epigraphic or sculptural evidence from Roman Scotland may not be surprising. Throughout the province of Britannia only 10% of inscriptions refer to a woman (Allason-Jones 2005: xi). This may well be because epigraphy was largely a military habit in which civilians were less inclined to indulge; a high proportion of surviving inscriptions are building inscriptions recording the erection of military edifices, such as Hadrian's Wall or the Antonine Wall or buildings associated with those barriers. Even in regard to religious dedications, women attached to military men were likely to expect formal religious observance to be the responsibility of the *pater familias* of the household; see, for example, a base found at Newstead dedicated to Silvanus by Gaius Arrius Domitianus 'for the welfare of himself and his family' (RIB I 2124).

The Roman Empire covered a vast area and evidence for inhabitants of Roman Scotland can be found in other provinces or in Rome itself. This can be seen in the story of the female servant of the

centurion Marcus Cocceius Firmus, a man famous for having dedicated at least four altars: to Diana and Apollo (*RIB* I 2174), the genius of this Land of Britain (*RIB* I 2175) Jupiter and Victory (*RIB* I 2176) and Mars, Minerva, the Goddesses of the Parade Ground, Hercules, Epona and Victory again (*RIB* I 2177) at Auchendavy. This female servant, sadly anonymous, committed a crime, presumably when at Auchendavy, also unspecified but heinous enough for her to be sentenced to cook for the other convicts in ‘the saltworks’ (*Digest* 49.15.6; Birley 1936). It is unclear where these saltworks were; Birley argued for somewhere along the coast of Fife, on the grounds that this was one of the few places where the necessary requirements for effective extraction of salt from seawater were available, but Whatley has shown that salt was extracted in many other places in Scotland in later periods, so either the east or west coast is a possible location (1987). Whilst she was serving her sentence this woman was ‘captured by bandits of an alien race’. Birley, due to his conviction that she must have been in Fife, presumed that these bandits were from further north on the mainland but other translations specify that these malefactors were pirates, in which case they could have come either from Ireland or one of the Germanic tribes (Mason 2003: 129, 172; Haywood 1991; Elverhøi 2010). The site of Auchendavy, being in the central sector of the Wall, does not help any argument. Whoever kidnapped her, they immediately sought to make a profit and ‘in the course of lawful trade’ she was sold back to Marcus Cocceius Firmus, although by then he might have thought she was more trouble than she was worth. The canny centurion then sought to recoup the sale price by demanding a refund from the Roman government, on the grounds that the State should have taken better care of his property whilst she was in its charge. That he was successful explains why the case was entered into the Roman Law Codes, the only case from Britannia to do so: it set a precedent. The tale tells us much about life in Roman Scotland; firstly, that centurions had households with them including female servants and, secondly, it gives us an insight into crime and punishment in the province as well as indicating that there were dangers to be faced which might not necessarily be the result of political activity. Life for any woman on a frontier, particularly one as short-lived as the Antonine Wall, was likely to be arduous and dangerous.

The evidence of footwear (CvD-M)

Some of the women discussed above may have left their shoes behind as a tangible legacy of their presence on the Antonine Wall. Favourable conditions have led to the survival of leather shoes at a number of Scottish forts, and from the start shoes belonging to women and children attracted attention (Anderson 1903). Indeed, at Bar Hill it was footwear that defined the concept of a military community:

‘Nothing brings this home so vividly, or with so distinctively human a touch, as the heaps of shoes that have been worn by women and by children.’ (Macdonald and Park 1906: 131).

Lawrence Keppie himself published the first full study on footwear from the Antonine Wall and considered the question of families at some length, concluding:

‘The Bar Hill footwear points to the presence in the vicinity of the fort of a considerable number of civilians, both women and children, even babies.’ (Keppie 1975: 82).

Following on from this study, I will draw on (partially) published assemblages from Balmuildy and Rough Castle, and my own observations on material from Camelton, Castlecary and Birrens (unpublished work in progress; Anderson 1903; Macdonald and Park 1906; Curle 1911; Miller 1922; McIvor *et al.* 1980). All

these assemblages date to approximately the same relatively short time span, c. 140-160 AD and the footwear forms a tightly knit 'Antonine' spectrum. To these can be added the large assemblage from Newstead, which covers a rather longer period of occupation,³ and a small group from Inveresk that appears to date slightly later in the second century (Bishop 2004). Together they present a consistent picture of women and their children as a normal adjunct of military life, supporting Keppie's conclusion of more than 40 years ago.

Footwear is a particularly sensitive tool with which to trace the presence of women and children in a living community. Shoes are common: unlike altars and gravestones, they are not restricted to the wealthy and several pairs of shoes would be required annually. When worn out they tend to be dumped casually as they are hardly worth recycling – and smelly to burn. In addition, on the Antonine Wall in particular, there seem to be sporadic clearance episodes that resulted in mass dumping of footwear in ditches, as is the case at Camelon, Bar Hill and possibly other less well-documented sites as well.

Shoes preserve the foot size of their owners and these sizes can, in turn be correlated with both sex and age (Groenman van Waateringe 1978; van Driel-Murray 1993: 42-6, Fig. 20; 1998; Greene 2014). From birth the feet of boys and girls grow – often in spurts – till puberty. At this point, girls' growth slows and ceases, while boys' feet continue to grow till about the ages of 15-16. Put simply, men have bigger feet than women, and when set out in a graph a characteristic double peak results, marking male and female sizes (cf. Figure 23.4). Furthermore, shoes form one of the few unequivocal archaeological markers for infants and children, and, as pointed out by Greene (2014: 27), these are especially powerful proxies for the presence of entire family units, rather than the 'slaves' and 'servants' (*calones*) that are occasionally trundled out in attempts to detract from the evidence for female presence in and around Roman forts.

Direct comparison between sole lengths from different sites is, however, complicated by various factors, such as original state, soil conditions, post excavation treatment (or lack of it), all of which affect the degree of shrinkage. Generally accepted estimates lie between 5-10% size loss but shoes from old excavations are likely to have suffered more shrinkage than those from a site such as Camelon, where the leather was not only sealed shortly after deposition, but was also professionally treated immediately following excavation. In such cases shrinkage is likely to be minimal (Douglas 2015: 171; Greene 2014: 30). Sometimes, as at Bar Hill, it is not clear whether the dimensions were taken only from insoles, or whether allowance for the rather larger outer sole was made, and it is likely that the larger sizes are inflated here. Nevertheless, an attempt to compare the profiles of the forts is presented in Table 1.

Except for Bar Hill, Camelon and Newstead, numbers of shoes are low and hardly representative, but even so, almost all sites display a range of sizes from children/juveniles to large adults. Even allowing for a male/female overlap and a tailback for boys (under 16's), the conclusion that women and children were present in some numbers in and around these forts is inescapable. Indeed, already in 1975 Keppie noted that 'only c. 65% ... may have come from full-size men's shoes' (1975: 82).⁴ Bar Hill is exceptional in the number of children's shoes as most children will have gone bare foot, resulting in the failure of

³ Newstead has a number of Flavian/Trajanic styles, and a few shoes post-date the Antonine Wall occupation. There is also some fragmentary evidence for Flavian/Trajanic shoe styles at Castlecary.

⁴ At Camelon the figure is 41%; at Newstead 39%.

site	child	juvenile	female	f/m	male	total
Bar Hill	21	12	67	46	176	322
Camelon	3		31	7	29	70
Newstead	7	6	28	7	31	79
Castlecary		4	8	2	8	22
Birrens			2		1	3
Balmuildy	1	2	3		5	11
Inveresk (well)			1		3	4
Rough Castle		1		1	7	9

Table 23.1 Antonine Wall forts summary of shoe size categories

them to show up in the smaller assemblages - as Johnson and Boswell noted on their travels, people were still going barefoot in the highlands in the eighteenth century: shoes are a luxury, not a necessity.

The child's shoe from the Flavian fort at Camelon (Maxfield, pers. comm.) is significant, as it attests to the presence of women in this earliest phase of military activity, as do the three Flavian/Trajanic female/child sized sandals from Newstead. This is hardly surprising in view of the occurrence of female clothing attributes and children's shoes at the early first century fort of Velsen (Netherlands), but such evidence needs to be stressed in relation to the interpretation of other finds categories (see below; van Driel-Murray 1999a: 175-6). An unusual find from Inveresk is the very fine cork slipper from a well in the *vicus* (van Driel-Murray 2004: 159, Fig. 111) (Figure 23.2). Found together with three to four adult male soles, this type of slipper is, according to Judit Pásztoókai-Szeőke exclusively female, appearing on tombstones as a symbol of femininity along with attributes such as

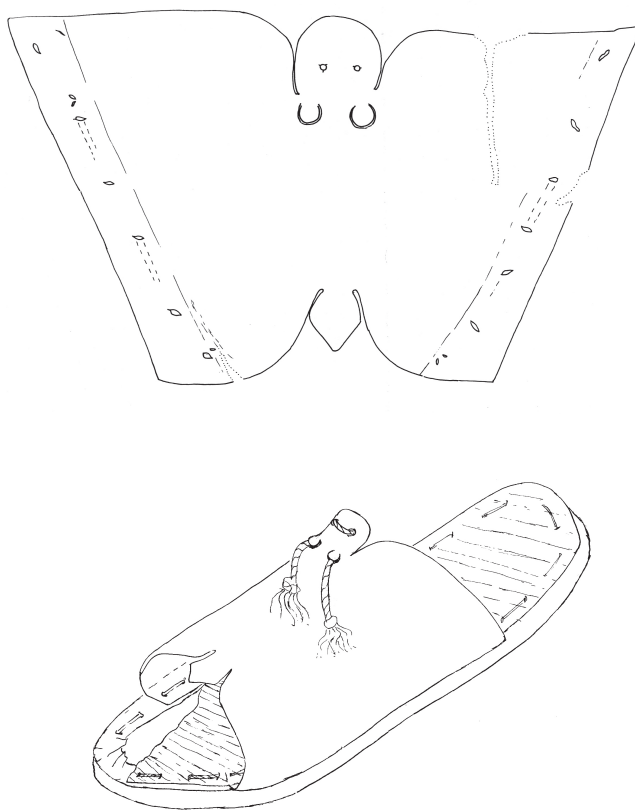


Figure 23.2. Cork slipper from Inveresk.

spindles, combs and mirrors (2005; van Driel-Murray 1999b: 80-82). Even if a link with the family of the procurator Lusius Sabinianus, who dedicated two altars at the site, is entirely speculative (if attractive), the slipper reveals that women of status were present - and not just raggle-taggle camp followers - even in forward forts and during unsettled times (Bishop 2004: 6: *RIB* I 2132). This particular leather assemblage post-dates the Antonine occupation, and presumably represents renewed interest in the

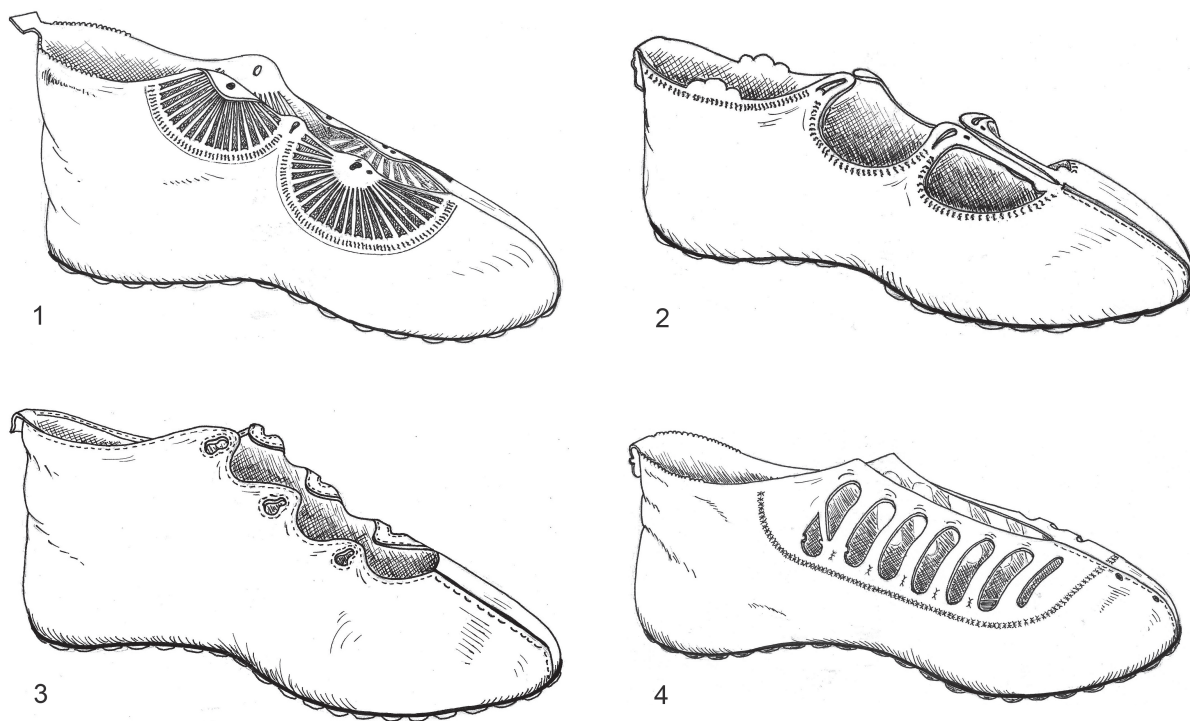


Figure 23.3. Main Antonine footwear styles: 1. Zwammerdam 2. Hardknott 3. Carron 4. Melrose (drawings © Mareille Arkesteijn).

region later in the second century (Bishop 2004: 185), which accords with the later date of some of the footwear recovered from Newstead. No other Antonine Wall site has slippers of this sort and, indeed, all the lighter types of footwear, such as sandals and soft sewn shoes, are in general rare. This is likely to reflect the harsh living conditions in these rather isolated forts, not to mention their sometimes awkward hill-top locations.

They may have lived on the edge of the Empire, but all members of these communities were abreast of current footwear fashion (van Driel-Murray 2016: 134). The most popular styles form a clearly defined Antonine association that can be recognized throughout the Roman Empire (Figure 23.3). The most distinctive feature is that shoes have become the norm for soldiers and civilians, women and children alike, replacing the boots and ankle boots that had dominated the footwear spectrum previously (van Driel-Murray 2001a; 2001b).⁵ Within the four dominant styles, shoes are individualized through slight variations in fastenings and with all manner of decorative details or openwork, giving the purchaser ample opportunity for self-expression.

Roman footwear is rarely sex specific and styles generally appear in all sizes. The popular style 'Hardknott', for instance, ranges from c. 13 cm (size 20, for a 3-4 year old child at Bar Hill, cf. Figure 23.6) to a huge example from Camelon at 28 cm, size 42. But from Camelon comes a hint of gendered

⁵ The classic military *caliga* had already been abandoned by the close of the first century in Britain. There are just two examples from Scotland: from Newstead and Mollins.

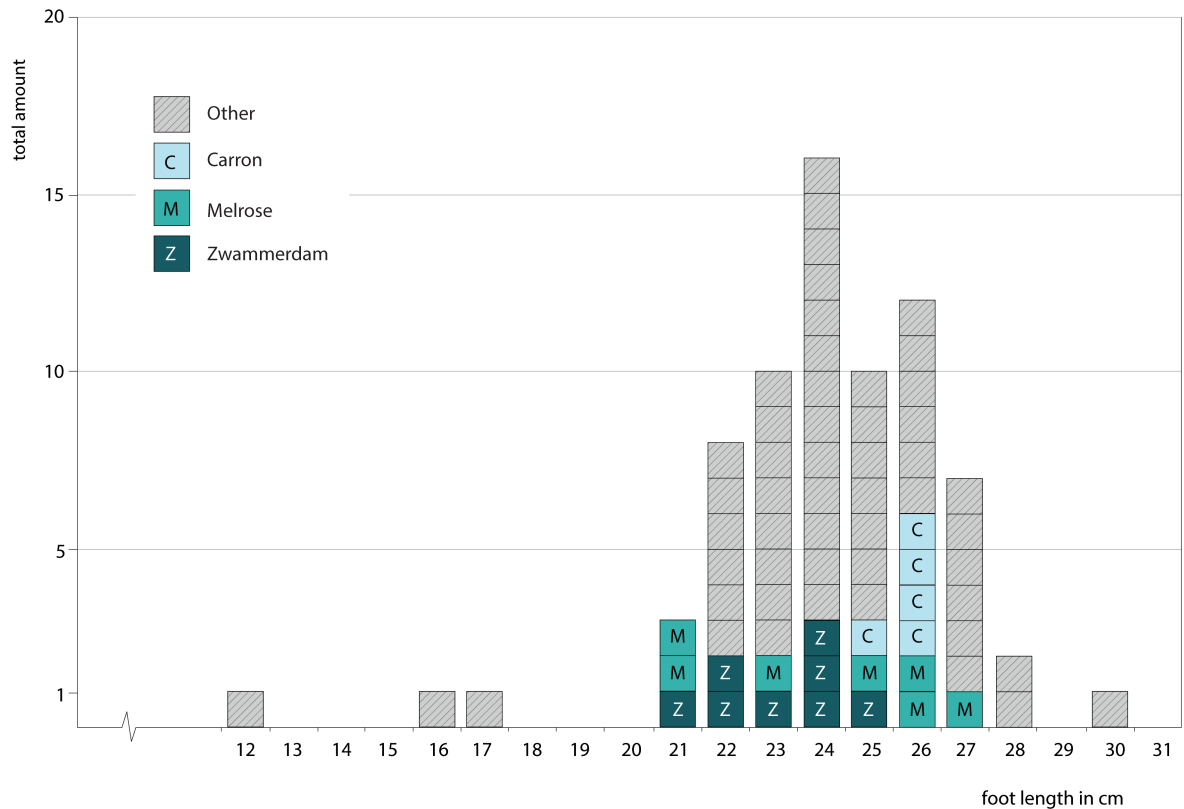


Figure 23.4. Graph of shoe styles correlated with size from Camelon.

preferences (Arkesteijn and van Driel-Murray 2015). Here, a sturdy lace-up shoe with radiating openwork around the lace holes, style 'Zwammerdam', clusters between 22–26 cm, with the mean at 24 cm (Figure 23.4). Complementing this ladies' shoe are two styles seemingly favoured by men: the 'Carron' and the 'Melrose', with most examples at 27+ cm and a tail off into smaller sizes (25 and 24 cm), possibly indicative of the area of the male/female overlap. However, these preferences are as yet only partly supported by finds from other sites. Although the majority do seem to be small, several 'Zwammerdam' shoes lie in the 24–25 cm range: are these larger size women, or is this a warning that the style might also be chosen by men? And if so, which men? For unlike the 'Melrose' and 'Carron' there do not seem to be any really large examples (over 25 cm). Even so, this illustrates the caution that is necessary in drawing conclusions and the need for testing such observations against large, statistically significant collections for certainty. Similarly, though the width of the sole may distinguish male from female, other factors are also at play: whether there is an allowance for socks or insulation in winter shoes and the degree of physical activity will also affect foot width (splaying). Changes in fashion are a major issue at sites with longer occupation, such as Newstead, even affecting the shape of soles, as is evident when the narrow shape current towards the end of the first century is compared to the more natural forms of the second (van Driel-Murray 2001b: 320).



Figure 23.5. A pair of 'Camelon' style ladies' shoes from Camelon.

On the other hand, Camelon represents a single dump episode, preserving the footwear current at a particular moment of time. It is quite likely that shifts in age and gender profiles may take place throughout the fashion cycle of a particular style. Thus sandals are rare in male sizes till the later second century, though women in urban communities had eagerly taken on the new fashions, and in Vindolanda sandals were being worn in the commander's household at the beginning of the second century. There are three Flavian/Trajanic sandals from Newstead and two sandal soles from Bar Hill (Keppie 1975: Fig. 21.1, 3) all in female sizes. A third fragment (Keppie 1975: Fig. 21.2) is evidently larger, and is of a rather narrow, shapely style that, curiously enough, witnesses the start of the gradual male acceptance of sandals as normal wear. This style of dress was seemingly first adopted by women in urban and elite military circles, and only slowly gained general currency, but by the end of the century, sandals for men and women are common even on northern settlements. Taken together, the Antonine Wall assemblages provide the sort of snapshots that are needed to unravel gendered variation in the uptake of clothing, quite apart from the normal fashion cycle where early adopters may, in time, stimulate emulation outside the initial groups (van Driel-Murray 2016: 145-6).

Although most shoes are relatively plain, some women sported elegant and even luxurious footwear. The upper of a pair of delicate boots from Camelon, ladies' size 35, is cut in a lacy pattern that demands a coloured lining, and the tiny lace holes would only allow the passage of a silk ribbon (Figure 23.5). Similar lacy openwork occurs at Newstead and Bar Hill, in both cases from small shoes, and other shoes are prettified with roundels, tabs and tooling on the surface. But it would be wrong to think that fine footwear was the privilege of women: one of the most elaborate of the Bar Hill shoes (Keppie 1975: Fig. 23.25) is a respectable size 40. Similarly, decorative nailing is more frequently seen on male footwear

than on ladies' (Bar Hill, Fig. 26.59; also at Camelon and Newstead). Such decoration is evidently a sign of status, not gender, as was already apparent from shoes of the officers' households at Vindolanda (van Driel-Murray 1993: Fig. 18-19, Pl VI; Greene 2014).

Macdonald and Park were slightly uncomfortable with the unexpectedly large numbers of women's and children's shoes at Bar Hill:

'These followers cannot, of course, have dwelt within the gates; that would have been a grave breach of military law. They must have been housed outside, with traders and others, in an *annexe* or civil settlement such as was invariably associated both with the *castella* of the auxiliary cohorts....' (Macdonald and Park 1906: 131).

From the barrack block finds at Vindolanda we now know these rules were not as strictly applied as was once thought, and considering the location of Bar Hill and the areas covered by the excavations, it seems likely that the shoes belonged to people living in the fort itself. Besides finds from the ditches, boots are recorded as coming from four of the nine refuse holes within the ramparts, as well as from the *praetorium* well (Macdonald and Park 1906, 61-63: 133; Keppie 1975: 82). In contrast, at Newstead, leather was preserved mainly in the ditches and the wells in the southern annex, reflecting the community and craftsmen living and working nearby. The footwear from Camelon had been dumped in one of the outer ditches of the southern annex, and presumably derives from people living there. However, as a single event dump, it is conceivable that the footwear had been collected from within the fort before it was tipped into the ditch and deliberately sealed over with clay (Arkesteijn and van Driel-Murray 2015; Douglas 2015: 171-2). This is reminiscent of the '...heaps of shoes...' noted at Bar Hill, and the disposal of collected fort refuse also remains a possibility for other assemblages from fort ditches, such as Castlecary and Balmuildy. Here the shoes were mixed with sheet leather⁶ in the ditches at the west gateway, again suggesting the refuse might have come from inside the fort (Miller 1922: 98, Pl. LVII). Any families living in Rough Castle must have been housed either within the fort, or else around the bathhouse in the small annexe to the east. It is unfortunate that so little of the footwear recovered from these forts can be traced to an exact location, but the overall impression is that families are to be found as much inside the forts as in the annexes.

The footwear is serviceable and long lasting, and subtle differences suggest shoes were made to measure. Even on isolated forts there was a desire for display and purchasers were keenly aware of the potential for individual expression in the playful combination of decorative details. These people must have been very conscious of presenting the Roman way of life on the furthest frontier and this may to some extent explain the impractical nailed shoes worn by some infants (Greene 2014; van Driel-Murray 2005). Two tiny soles from Newstead (13 and 14 cm = size <21) are relatively lightly nailed, but a similarly sized 'Hardknott'-style shoe from Bar Hill is a miniature adult's shoe, carefully made, with decorative treatment and a fully nailed sole. Some of the c. 60 hobnails had even been replaced, indicating serious wear (Keppie 1975: Fig. 25.49) (Figure 23.6). If iron nails possessed some kind of magical purpose, as Dungworth has argued (1998: 157), such ideas may have transferred to hobnails, rendering nailed baby boots doubly protective, but there is also an ideological element involved, with nailed footwear projecting the sartorial expectations of correct Roman dress (Greene 2014; van Driel-Murray 2005).

⁶ Tent leather, but first assumed to be soldiers' clothing.

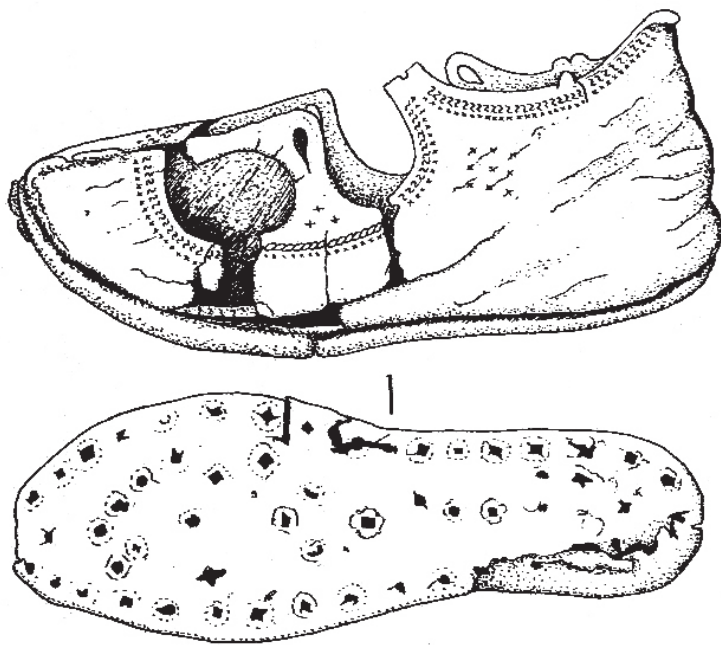


Figure 23.6. Bar Hill child's shoe. The outer sole length is 15.5 cm; foot length c. 14 cm (drawing by Margaret Scott, from Keppie 1975: Fig. 25.49).

Here, women take an active part in the creation of social cohesion by protecting their children and promoting 'Roman-ness' across the generations in a hostile environment. This pride may also explain the extreme wear visible on some shoes, especially noticeable in the assemblage from Camelon. Even in times of supply stress, Roman nailed shoes had to be displayed at all costs by all members of the military community, regardless of whether the sole had worn through, or a loose upper had to be tied back with string.

Nailed footwear defined a visible community of soldiers and non-combatants, including numerous women and children, contrasting strongly with the dress of the

native inhabitants. This emphasis on visible symbols matches the aggressive displays of martiality on the Distance Stones, and might be taken as a sign of fear and uncertainty. Small communities huddled behind extensive earthworks felt their vulnerability and needed to reinforce their sense of belonging to the wider empire through their distinctive footwear and the protection it gave them.

The small finds (EMG)

The picture we have so far shows quite clearly that to find women in the archaeological record — on the Antonine Wall or anywhere else — requires consideration of all the evidence available. The fact that the most robust evidence appears to be the leather footwear provides a keen warning about how often our analysis is affected by what is not available to us. So often inscriptions are used to reconstruct the people and lives of the past, and they are indeed usually our only hope of starting to understand how individuals identified themselves, but in this case-study the results would appear to support the old notion that the military environment, especially on the developing frontiers, was no place for women and children. However, when other evidence is brought to bear, the image changes dramatically. The leather footwear makes it quite clear that the Antonine Wall forts were inhabited as much by non-combatants, either inside or outside the forts themselves, as they were by military personnel. It is, perhaps, not surprising that so few inscriptions reflect the lives of women on the Antonine Wall, as was discussed above, in which case one hopes to look to other bodies of evidence for support. This is especially true when other frontiers of the empire, such as Hadrian's Wall or the Raetian *limes*, have given so much evidence for the presence of military families in both peaceful and unsettled periods (Allason-Jones 1997; 1999a; van Driel-Murray 1993; 1998; Maxfield 2002; Allison 2013; Greene 2013a).

If we turn to the last category of evidence — the artefacts left behind by the inhabitants of the Antonine Wall settlements — a somewhat bleak picture is presented, but one that can nonetheless be used as an important caveat for the study of women in the archaeological record. The small finds from the Antonine Wall could prove to be especially interesting because of its short occupation period of about twenty years. It is commonly suggested that wives and children would have joined their soldier-husbands only after life was settled, perhaps a decade or more after a unit occupied an area. However, since the Antonine Wall assemblages, particularly the footwear, betray the presence of these individuals in the short period of occupation, it suggests a rather quick settlement of women, children and families, if not immediate occupation, even during periods of conquest and consolidation of a region, as was concluded above in consideration of the Flavian period footwear from Camelon and Newstead. As Allason-Jones has stated (1999a), the best way for a military family to thrive is to stick close to the soldier/breadwinner, and this notion was perhaps heeded in both peaceful and unsettled periods. If women and children were present on the Antonine Wall in some numbers, which the footwear evidence considered above seems to suggest, then we also need to consider how this operated when the units moved to a new frontier in a potentially volatile zone. Settlement patterns of this sort, occupation of women and children in zones of uncertainty if not volatility, are almost never considered for the non-combatants associated with the Roman army (Greene 2013a; see also Velsen in the first century: van Driel- Murray 1999a).

Evidence from elsewhere on the northern frontiers indicates that we do not necessarily need to think in terms of significant lag times for family members to join the soldiers, nor even that the region be particularly settled and peaceful. At Vindolanda, the evidence from the very earliest occupation phase (Period 1, c. 85-90 AD) betrays the presence of women and children even in this short-lived period of settlement in a newly created, potentially volatile frontier zone (Greene 2013a: 19-23). The defensive ditches of the Period 1 fort have produced nearly 60 leather shoes (van Driel-Murray 1993; Birley 1994: 15-35; Birley 2003: 1-7; Birley and Blake 2005: 77-81), of which at least 37% and possibly more belonged to individuals that fit the profile of women, adolescents and children (Greene 2013a).

It is unfortunate that we cannot compare the small finds assemblages from this period because the internal spaces of the fort are inaccessible, lying metres under the third-century stone fort and its internal structures. However, the shoes alone suggest that women and children were along for the ride, at least in some forts on the northern frontiers, at the same time that the units occupied and settled these regions. The writing tablets from Vindolanda dating to the periods just after initial occupation (Periods 2-4, c. 90-120 AD) further support the notion that families were a constant presence in and around the forts, even during periods of settlement and entrenchment (van Driel-Murray 1998; Greene 2013a; 2013b; 2014). Though the Antonine Wall area was consolidated during a time when the empire as a whole was more settled than it had been in the first century, it was still an active military zone that was newly established in the middle of the second century and could give us clues to the timing of familial movement in and between military zones.

With the footwear evidence in mind, a look at the artefacts associated with Antonine Wall forts is in order. Though the picture is not filled out particularly well from the remaining evidence, this investigation provides another important caveat about how much the material remains are able to answer our questions. Other than two examples of *tettinae* (sometimes identified as infant feeding bottles) from Mumrills and Bearsden (Steer 1961: 92 and 122-23; Bidwell and Croom 2016: 118-19),

none of the artefact assemblages loudly betray the presence of women in the Antonine Wall forts, but at the same time, most artefacts are also not exclusively related to male activity. This situation should be heeded as a warning about how we assign a gender association with certain items, a subject made clear decades ago by Allason-Jones (1995). Since the archaeology of sex and gender became a popular research subject in the early 1990s, the onus has been on scholars to prove the presence of women through various means. That is to say, the presence of men and the fact that the material record inherently reflects their existence in a particular place has been considered a given everywhere. The presence of women, apparently, still needs to be proven. To be sure, in the case of Roman military forts and their surrounding communities it seems obvious that men are there from a quantity of evidence including texts, inscriptions and artefacts. Yet, the only small finds that really loudly declare the presence of soldiers with certainty are armour and weaponry, those items that are necessary for a soldier to do his job. However, if we look at the vast majority of finds reports from Roman forts, they are filled with all manner of artefacts that have no particular gendered association, yet they have been assigned 'male' because of their presence in a fort. Even hobnails are sometimes associated with soldiers, despite the thousands of shoes from the western Empire that were clearly worn by women or children and are kitted out with a sole of iron hobnails. As Allason-Jones asked twenty years ago, 'what is a military assemblage?' (1999b).

The finds catalogues from the Antonine Wall do not differ greatly from one another and none of them provides strong evidence that small finds will prove beyond doubt that women were present in military forts. However, we saw above from the footwear evidence that women and children comprised a significant part of the population at forts where leather is preserved in the material record. It seems unlikely that those shoes reached the site erroneously and it seems less likely that those are the only forts where women and children were present and we happen to have found their shoes in those places. Therefore, we may assume that women occupied most military settlements and made up at least some of the population on the Antonine Wall. It is more challenging to understand their locations of activity, social role and generally what their lives were like living on the northern frontier of the Roman empire.

If we look at the Antonine period finds from Camelon as an example (Allason-Jones forthcoming), a typical picture emerges from the small finds of life at a Roman military fort. Metal work is ubiquitous, but it is clear that finds of specifically military character are not. From the Antonine period associated with the Wall garrisons there are only three finds - a scabbard runner, a harness junction and a *lorica* belt - that are certainly associated with military kit, presumably worn by men. Weapons and armour were found in small quantities (four each of spear heads, arrow heads and bits of mail together with a dagger handle) and hobnails are listed as potentially reflecting the military individuals present on site. Other finds may be part of military accoutrement but are not certainly associated with soldiers. In other words, this description sounds very much like one that discusses the presence of female individuals, with a number of qualifications about the lack of evidence and ambiguous nature of its deposition or location. We often point to spinning or weaving equipment, which in a military context may or may not indicate the presence of women (Allison 2013; 2006; Alberti 2018: 2-4; James 2006), or perhaps beads, hairpins or other pieces of jewellery that are presumed to have been left behind by female inhabitants (e.g. Hoffman 2006). All of these, however, have been questioned at some time about their ability to reveal the presence of a female user, just as we see with most of the finds at Camelon. Therefore, the number of items that are by default used to indicate the presence of men in a fort - and

it is worth saying that that usually included everything found when there was no expectation that women might be present - are indeed rather ambiguous.

The majority of finds from the Antonine phase at Camelon include the expected group of ironwork related to structures such as nails and hinges, items associated with transport, and vessels (though they predominate in the Flavian period) all of which would be absurd to assign use by a male or female. A few stand-out decorative items are equally ambiguous; items decorated with panther motifs and a silver ring with carnelian intaglio with a parrot incised on the bezel show a Bacchic influence, but upon whom we cannot say. These items no more suggest the presence of women or men than anything else since we simply cannot know who chose to associate themselves with them. This conclusion is equally true for the many copper-alloy studs, plates, and buckles that cannot with certainty carry an assertion of their owner unless they have a very specifically military character, which most do not.

Camelon, therefore, despite having an almost equal number of shoes in its deposits that were as likely worn by women as those worn by men (Table 23.1), would be classified as a predominantly male preserve if not for the survival of the leather. This is all the more surprising and something to heed carefully considering that the Camelon shoes appear to represent a single event of discard, perhaps before departure, rather than the extended period of casual loss and discard from the long years of occupation. Since it is untenable to argue that women joined the population from the moment of decampment, and since it is clear that women and children were always part of the extramural communities surrounding Roman military forts, we can only assume that the daily lives of the entire population of a military settlement left behind very little material culture that can be 'gendered' with any certainty.

At another Antonine Wall fort, there is a slightly different but not dissimilar picture to that found at Camelon. Lawrence Keppie will be familiar with the metalwork catalogue from Bearsden (Keppie 2016: 197-220), which includes quite a few more pieces of weaponry than at Camelon. Several *pilum* heads make up the assemblage together with 47 arrowheads and other pieces of what are clearly weaponry and armour. Otherwise, the assemblage of iron comprises items such as tools and small implements, structural items and strapping that carry no association with an individual. Included in the iron report are the hobnails from shoes, but of course, as was shown above, the studs on their own can carry no assumption of who wore the shoe to which they once belonged. Only a very small amount of leather has come from Bearsden (Gallagher 2016: 305-7), only one item of which is measurable (24.5 cm), but had there been greater anaerobic conditions on the site, we may have shown a similar range of inhabitants as was revealed from the Camelon material assemblage.

If we consider items of adornment at Bearsden the image is no less cloudy. Two intaglios that originally sat in a metal ring could be associated with anyone living on the site (Henig 2016) and the same could be said for the ring and gemstone evidence at Camelon (Allason-Jones forthcoming). This is particularly true for the middle second century when intaglios had ceased to be a personal marker for sealing letters and were a mass-produced product with low-quality knock-offs available to almost anyone who chose to obtain one. Glass vessels and ceramic tableware from the Antonine Wall are similarly unable, on current research, to give us information about women either making or using such items.

In short, most of the artefactual evidence from Bearsden, Camelon and other sites on the Antonine Wall will tell us little about individuals. Other than military equipment that we can clearly associate with

a Roman soldier, items that have in the past been associated with either male or female occupation are either quite ambiguous or rather foolish to consider as having a 'gendered' association. This short evaluation provides a renewed caveat that we are not seeing the whole picture of life at a fort, and especially not the population present, when we evaluate single categories of evidence such as small finds. It is only when we are given the rare glimpse of organic remains such as leather or wooden shoes that we can really fill in the picture of the inhabitants of a settlement, and it is only when we have inscriptions (or the rare cases of writing tablets) that we start to understand the individuals themselves and catch a glimpse of their projected identities.

Conclusions

Over the years, most discussions of women being on the Antonine Wall have tended both to ignore the evidence and to reflect the attitude of the predominantly male antiquarians and archaeologists of the day. This was particularly noticeable when Macdonald and Park tried to account for the large number of women's shoes at Bar Hill (1906: 131, quoted above). If, however, one uses the evidence, even if it is on occasion rather sparse, it is clear that there were women in and around the forts, women from all levels of society from those who wore highly decorated shoes tied with silk ribbons to those who wore their shoes until the soles were worn through.

The paucity of evidence, however, should not be seen as damning. The limited number of inscriptions, for example, accurately reflects the 10% identified as the norm for inscriptions dedicated by women as opposed to men throughout Roman Britain (Allason-Jones 2005: xi). Few of the sites on the Antonine Wall have been excavated extensively or with modern excavation techniques, and Roman Scotland as a whole is not known for its large material assemblages. It should also be remembered that, despite their best efforts, the Roman occupation of the land north of the Tyne-Solway line was intermittent. The move to the Antonine Wall was a short occupation with later intentions to conquer Scotland even shorter.

If twenty years is a considerable chunk of an individual's life, however, it is a short period for a Roman installation and the Antonine Wall would still have seemed a new venture when the order came to abandon it and return south. The inhabitants, male or female, would have gone through their accumulated belongings and disposed of what they did not need to keep, such as worn out shoes, but carefully packed up what they wanted to take with them to their next posting. What would be left would be the rubbish or items that were immovable because of their size or their nature, such as altars and tombstones. In the case of Roman Scotland, the evidence of the small finds, usually a large proportion of a site's material evidence, is minimal in quantity but, as stated above, the survival of small finds depends on the way a site is abandoned. In the past, the presence of women on a site was usually only accepted if jewellery was found (Allason-Jones 1995), the very items most women would carefully pack and take away with them.

Even if the evidence is limited, it is most revealing. It is noticeable that the different sources of information available to us reflect different levels of society. Epigraphic evidence, for example, not only provides us with the names of people who lived in an area at any one time and, in the case of Lowland Scotland, indicates the cosmopolitan nature of these people, it also represents the better off and the more or less literate. It is evident that women from all over the empire were present, as is

shown by the Celtic Magunna and the possibly African Vibia Pacata. These inscriptions also indicate how different religions travelled with people as they crossed the empire. The tombstone of Afutianus (RIB I 2115) also demonstrates how women would take responsibility for ensuring that the correct funerary rituals were carried out for their deceased relatives. Flavia Baetica, sadly, would have had to leave her husband's grave behind when she moved away from Birrens.

The wearing of shoes represents a wider cross section of society, including those who are often nameless, and indicates whether their wearers required stout boots or party pumps, although the poorest and the natives may have gone unshod or with footwear made from un-tanned leather which does not survive. Shoes from the Antonine Wall also point to an interest in fashion and the lines of communications that kept wearers abreast of the latest modes. Knowing the latest fashion in hairstyles simply required seeing the latest coins of an empress; the latest shoe styles needed more direct information (Allason-Jones 2005: 129-30; van Driel-Murray 2016: 144). In this, the material evidence from Lowland Scotland reflects the empire as a whole, an empire in which approximately 50% of the population will have been women.

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