

THE *COHORS I HAMIORUM* IN BRITAIN*

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ABSTRACT

A newly published military diploma, probably found in the Balkans, issued to a veteran of the *cohors I Hamiorum sagittariorum* in December AD 132, allows a conjecture to be made about the cohort's previous history before its earliest attestation in another diploma for the army of Britain, of AD 122. The suggestion is that it had participated in Trajan's Dacian Wars, had been based in Moesia Inferior and had been brought to Britain in AD 118 to reinforce the army there, weakened by a revolt. In the remainder of the article the famous metrical poem at the cohort's base on Hadrian's Wall, in honour of the *Virgo Caelestis*, identified with the Syrian Goddess, is discussed. It is argued that there is no basis for the view, still repeatedly propagated (in spite of cogent rebuttals), that the dedicator identified the goddess with the empress Julia Domna.

The existence of the auxiliary regiment discussed in this paper is first securely attested in the reign of Hadrian and hence it does not qualify for mention in Denis Saddington's monograph on the *auxilia*, of which the terminal dates are 49 BC to AD 79. But one may draw attention to his comments on the early references to regiments of archers, of which the *cohors I Hamiorum* was one: the *sagittarii* were among the first specialist or 'professional' auxiliary units to be recorded in Roman service.¹ The exact

* It is a pleasure, mingled with sadness at our loss, to offer these pages to a volume in memory of Denis Saddington. Geography dictated that our contacts were mainly by post and later by e-mail, but it was a great joy when we had a chance to meet at conferences and to discuss Roman military affairs.

For advice on archer regiments I am grateful to Paul Holder, whose knowledge of the Roman *auxilia* is encyclopaedic.

¹ D.B. Saddington, *The Development of the Roman Auxiliary Forces from Caesar to Vespasian (49 B.C.-A.D. 79)* (University of Zimbabwe 1982), esp. 24, 30-35, 137, 139, 194. At 174, he discusses the variant titlature *sagittaria* and *sagittariorum*, mostly abbreviated *sag.*, *sagitt.* or *sagittar.* in epigraphic texts, on which see now R. Frei-Stolba & H. Lieb, 'Sag(-): *cohors sag(ittaria)* ou *sag(ittariorum)* – un problème d'édition de texte', *Epigraphica* 71 (2009) [2010] 291-302. They argue that *sagittariorum* is the proper expansion.

size of auxiliary regiments is not easy to establish, but Paul Holder convincingly concludes that the 'standard-sized' infantry cohorts, *cohortes peditatae quingenariae*, were some 480 men strong. There were also 'part-mounted' ones, *cohortes equitatae*, in which 120 cavalymen served alongside the 480 foot-soldiers. Further, there were double-strength, 'milliary' or 'one thousand' strong, cohorts. The term *milliaria* evidently meant, in practice, 800 men for double-strength cohorts with infantrymen only, *cohortes peditatae milliariae*, and 1,040 (800 + 240) for part-mounted ones, *cohortes equitatae milliariae*. As for the cavalry *alae*, most were about 500 strong (the small number of 'milliary' *alae* in practice each numbered about 800 men).²

The Roman army of the 'High Empire' in due course included over forty archer regiments: at least ten cavalry *alae* and over thirty infantry cohorts. Three of the standard-sized cohorts and five of the 'milliary' ones were *equitatae*; and there were a further three 'milliary' cohorts of infantry only. All told, the paper-strength of the Roman army's archers must have been well over 20,000 men, but they were thinly distributed throughout the provinces. It is noteworthy that most were originally raised in the East. This was the case with five of the *alae*: *I Commagenorum*, *II Flavia Commagenorum*, *I Hamiorum*, *I Augusta Ituraeorum* and *Parthorum*. The others were the *alae Gallorum et Thracum Antiana*, *I Thracum veterana*, *I Augusta Thracum*, *I Thracum civium Romanorum* and *III Augusta Thracum*. There were a good twenty eastern *cohortes*, while several others with titles that did not advertise their origin are quite likely to have been raised in the East as well. In addition, one must note the 'irregular' *Palmyreni sagittarii* that served in Trajan's Dacian wars.³ Some other archer cohorts were clearly raised elsewhere: *I Bosporanorum*, *III Bracaraugustanorum*, *I Cretum*, *III Augusta Cyrenaica*, *I Aelia Gaesata*, *I Numidarum*, *I Thracum* and *III Thracum Syriaca*. In the period from Augustus to Trajan recruitment to

² P.A. Holder, *Studies in the Auxilia of the Roman Army from Augustus to Trajan* (BAR Int. Ser. 70, Oxford 1980) 5-9.

³ The lists in J.L. Davies, 'Roman arrowheads from Dinorben and the *sagittarii* of the Roman army', *Britannia* 8 (1977) 257-70, at 269-70, naturally require considerable revision. A good deal of more recent evidence is supplied by J.E.H. Spaul, *Ala². The Auxiliary Cavalry Units of the Pre-Diocletianic Imperial Roman Army* (Andover 1994) and *id.*, *Cohors². The Evidence for and a Short History of the Auxiliary Infantry Units of the Imperial Roman Army* (BAR Int. ser. 841, Oxford 2000); but some additions and changes to his lists are also required in the light of new finds, not least of new diplomas, as published in the later volumes of *RMD* and *AE*, and in B. Pferdehirt, *Römische Militärdiplome und Entlassungs-urkunden in der Sammlung des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums* (Mainz 2004), no. 32. For the 'irregular' Palmyrene archers, see *CIL* 16.68; *RMD* 16, 27, 28.

the eastern regiments in general seems to have continued to be from the original area where they were raised.⁴ But as will be seen this was not a rigid rule.

Only one of these archer regiments was stationed in Britain, the *cohors I Hamiorum sagittariorum*, a standard-size *cohors quingenaria* of some 480 men.⁵ The chief town of the Hamii was the ancient Hama or Hamath (the name evidently means 'fortress') in central Syria, on the River Orontes, some 110 miles north of Damascus. Hamath's earliest known inhabitants were Amorites, who colonised the area in the 3rd millennium BC. Around 1500 BC it was part of the empire of Mitanni, but was captured by the Hittites after the battle of Kadesh in 1295 BC. After the collapse of the Hittite Empire in about 1200 BC, it came under Assyrian influence and was settled by Aramaeans, speakers of Aramaic. That was to become the main language of the whole Near East, including Palestine in the time of Jesus. In the Old Testament, Hamath is first mentioned as one of the Canaanite communities. King David had dealings with King Toi of Hamath, and the city was later conquered by Solomon, who made it one of his 'store cities'. From the 9th century BC onwards the revived Assyrian Empire repeatedly attacked Hamath, which fell in 720 BC; in the next two centuries it came under Babylonian rule, then from 540 to the 330s BC formed part of the Persian Empire. Alexander the Great conquered Syria along with the remaining Persian territories, and it was ruled by one of the successor dynasties, the Seleucids, until Rome took it over in 64 BC. Like many eastern cities under Greco-Macedonian rule Hama(th) was given a new Greek name, in its case Epiphan(e)ia, after King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (reigned 175-164 BC).

During the Roman period the city is scarcely mentioned in our sources until Christianisation in the 4th century AD. It is no surprise that the regiments raised here, two or three cohorts and an *ala*, no doubt from the hardy peasants of Hama(th)-Epiphania's hinterland, retained the old name, Hamii. That name was never forgotten; at the time of the Arab conquest in AD 638-39 it was at once revived and is still used today. Modern Hama has some 527,000 inhabitants, making it the fifth largest city in Syria.⁶

⁴ Holder (note 2) 115, 118, 135 (Table 8.11).

⁵ The evidence is assembled by P.A. Holder, *The Roman Army in Britain* (London 1982) 117; Spaul, *Cohors* (note 2) 408-09.

⁶ See, for example, 'Epiphaneia 4', *RE* 6.1 (1907) 192, and the informative <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hama>. At the time of writing (June 2011), Hama and other Syrian cities have been frequently mentioned in news reports, for distressing reasons.

In the case of the regiment stationed in Britain the men worshipped what must be a local goddess, Ham(m)ia, as well as the *dea Syria*. The main shrine of the famous Syrian fertility goddess was at the 'holy city', Hierapolis, also called Bambyce, some 120 miles north-east of Hama(th), close to the River Euphrates. Her Syrian name was Atargatis, but the Greeks and Romans knew her just as 'the Syrian goddess'; as such she appears at Carvoran (see below).⁷

No evidence survives to tell us when the cohort stationed in Britain was first raised. The earliest record of its presence in the army of Britain is from the reign of Hadrian, in diplomas from the years 122 (*CIL* 16.69), 124 (*CIL* 16.70), 127 (*RMD* 240) and 135 (*CIL* 16.82). Inscriptions of late Hadrianic date disclose that the cohort was stationed at Carvoran/*Magna*. That fort was first built alongside the east-west Stanegate road that preceded Hadrian's Wall, at the junction with another road, the Maiden Way, which comes north across the Pennines. At this point the Stanegate is very close to the line of the Wall, and the fort was incorporated into the Wall-system. But unusually, the Vallum, which runs to the south of the Wall, rather than enclosing this fort as in other cases, was laid out some 130 yards (just under 120 metres) to the north of its defences. This was perhaps conditioned by the presence of a bog.⁸

The date of the regiment's presence at Carvoran is supplied by a dedication to 'Imperial Fortune' by its commander, *RIB* 1.1778, an altar found in 1831, in the *apodyterium* of the bath-house inside the south-west angle of the fort:

Fortunae Aug(ustae) pro salute L. Aeli Caesaris ex visu T. Fla(vius)
Secundus praef(ectus) coh(ortis) I Hamiorum sagittar(iorum)
v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito),

To Imperial Fortune, for the health of Lucius Aelius Caesar, because of a vision Titus Flavius Secundus, prefect of the First Cohort of Hamian Archers, willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.

Lucius Ceionius Commodus, *consul ordinarius* in 136, was adopted that year by Hadrian and given the names Lucius Aelius Caesar, but died on 1

⁷ On the cult, see now especially J.L. Lightfoot, *Lucian: On the Syrian Goddess* (Edited, with introd., transl. and comm.) (Oxford 2003).

⁸ On the fort, see E. Birley, *Research on Hadrian's Wall* (Kendal 1961) 192-96; on its position in relation to the Vallum, 195; R.E. Birley, *The Fort at the Rock* (Greenhead 1998); D.J. Breeze, *J. Collingwood Bruce's Handbook to the Roman Wall* (14th ed., Newcastle upon Tyne 2006) 280-82.

January 138.⁹ This allows the prefect's altar to be closely dated. Under his command the soldiers of the regiment were constructing the fort walls. The centuries of Primus and Silvanus each built 112 feet 'under Flavius Secundus the prefect':

RIB 1.1818, 7 Primi[... | v[alla]vit p(edes) CX[II] sub Fl(avio)
Secundo pr(a)ef(ecto); 1820, 7 Silvani | vallavit | p(edes) CXII sub
| Fl(avio) Secundo | [pr]aef(ecto).

Other building-stones found nearby, not naming Flavius Secundus, may also belong to this phase: 1813 (century of Claudius), 1814 (century of Felix), 1816 (century of Julius Ca[...]), 1819 (century of Sentius Priscus), 1821 (century of Valerius Cassia[nus]). But 1811, 1812, 1815, 1817, 1821, 1823, 1824 were definitely or very probably set up by legionary gangs or those from other units, working on Hadrian's Wall itself or the Vallum, not by men from the Hamii.

The place or places where the *coh. I Hamiorum* was stationed before the late 130s are unknown. It has been suggested that it had come to Britain as part of the invasion force in AD 43,¹⁰ but there is no direct evidence for this. In his account of the great battle between the Romans and the rebels under Boudica in the year 60, Cassius Dio (62.12.3-4) refers to Roman archers, which might suggest that Suetonius Paullinus had at least one such regiment in his army. But non-specialist units were given training in the use of the bow so the arrows might have been fired by men from other auxiliary regiments or indeed by legionaries.¹¹

⁹ *PIR*² C 605; A.R. Birley, *Hadrian the Restless Emperor* (London & New York 1997) 289-94. H. Devijver in his *Prosopographia Militiarum Equestrum* (Leuven 1979-1993, 5 vols.), hereafter *PME*, under F 69, suggests that the origin of the prefect T. Flavius Secundus was perhaps in the province of Asia. However, it is quite possible that he was from the West. On the large number of clearly western equestrian officers called Flavius in the Vindolanda tablets, as early as the first years of Trajan's reign, see A.R. Birley, 'Names new and old from recent excavations at Vindolanda', in M. Dondin-Payre (ed.), *Les noms de personnes dans l'Empire romain. Transformations, adaptation, évolution* (Paris 2011) 263-74, at 272-73.

¹⁰ Holder (note 5) 117; M.G. Jarrett, 'Non-legionary troops in Britain: part one, the units', *Britannia* 25 (1984) 35-71, at 61, allows that it could have been in Britain before its first attestation in a diploma.

¹¹ Cf. *ILS* 2558 and Dio 69.9.6, commemorating the remarkable archery skills of a soldier in the 'Batavians', clearly Hadrian's Horse Guards, in the year 118: see M.P. Speidel, 'Swimming the Danube under Hadrian's eyes. A feat of the emperors' Batavi horse guard', *AncSoc* 22 (1991) 277-82. Cavalrymen were all expected to

At all events, a new diploma has now opened up another possibility regarding the previous history of this cohort.¹² The document is interesting in several respects, not least in showing that Hadrian still had the title *proconsul* on the day that the *constitutio* was issued, 9 December 132, hence was still outside Italy. No doubt he was in Judaea, where the great uprising led by Bar-Kochba had broken out. Further, the governor of Britain named on the diploma, is the man who was eventually to defeat the insurgents, Sextus or Gnaeus Julius Severus, ‘the foremost of Hadrian’s leading generals’, whom Hadrian later transferred to Judaea from Britain (Dio 69.13.2).¹³ But for the present enquiry the chief interest concerns the recipient:

coh(ortis) I Hamior(um) sagitt(ariorum) cui prae(e)st M. Mussius
Concessus, ex pedite Longino Sesti f. MOMS, et Longino f. eius et
Sestio f. eius et Sestiae fil. eius.

Nothing much can be learned from the veteran’s name or his patronymic, repeated in the names of his sons and daughter. The editors comment that ‘his *origo* as inscribed on both tablets, MOMS, cannot definitely be equated with a known place name of the Roman period. One possible town is Momoasson or Momasson in Cappadocia on the road between Ancyra and Tarsos.¹⁴ This place name is therefore perhaps unknown or perhaps a scribal error. A possible alternative name would be MONT(anensi) identifying the recipient’s home as Montana in Moesia inferior,’ but they offer no further details.¹⁵ The opportunity may now be taken to elaborate

use the bow, according to Arrian, *Tactica* 43.1-3; and Vegetius, *Epit. rei militaris* 1.15, advocated that a proportion of recruits be trained in archery.

¹² W. Eck, P. Holder & A. Pangerl, ‘A diploma for the army of Britain and Hadrian’s return to Rome from the east’, *ZPE* 174 (2010) 189-200.

¹³ See e.g. A.R. Birley, *The Roman Government of Britain* (Oxford 2005) 129-32, suggesting that he was governor of Britain c. 131-133. Another new diploma shows that he was already in Britain in 130, *AE* 2006:1836.

¹⁴ They cite *RE* 16.1, cols. 41-42 and F. Hild & M. Restle, *Tabula imperii Byzantini Bd. 2: Kappadokia, Charsianon, Sebasteia und Lykandos* (Vienna 1981) 239.

¹⁵ Eck, Holder & Pangerl (note 12) 195-96, attribute the suggestion to the present writer. On Montana, cf. N.B. Rankov, ‘A contribution to the military and administrative history of Montana’, in A.G. Poulter (ed.), *Ancient Bulgaria 2* (Nottingham 1983) 40-73, who *inter al.* disputes that it became a *municipium*, as often stated, arguing that the district was known as the *regio Montanensis*. The modern town, under Communist rule renamed Mihailovgrad, has since 1993 resumed its ancient name.

this case, in the light of the misspellings in the text. The editors make the following observations about the lettering:

The length of the foot of I and L, E and F, can be similar. The context generally reveals which letter was intended. In a few instances the incorrect letter has definitely been cut probably as a result of misreading the ink original. Thus the intus of tabella I line 9 has LVLIO rather than IVLIO. Tabella II inner face first line has LD instead of ID. The extrinsecus of tabella I has CONCLSSVS not CONCESSVS on line 21 and line 24 has LONGINO L instead of LONGINO F. The inner face of tabella I line 6 has CETT rather than CELT; again most likely because of problems in reading the ink original.¹⁶

One other example of a misspelling, not mentioned by the editors, is SING instead of LING in line 6 of the intus. Taken together, all these items indicate that the engraver in some cases turned I, E and F into L, and L into T or S. His misreadings affected both the cross and upright strokes of E, F and T, and the uprights I and L. They permit the inference that NT in a cursive MONT could have been taken for MS. One could postulate, for example, that the cross stroke of T looked like a fourth stroke attached to the N, giving it the appearance of M and that the remaining slightly curved upright part was taken as S.

Two further considerations may be brought forward to support the case for Longinus being a native of Montana. First, although the find-spot of the diploma is 'unknown', there is a very strong probability that it derives from the Balkans, and specifically from Bulgaria, like so many others that have come onto the antiques market in recent years, particularly in Munich. In that case, Longinus will have returned to his original home after his *missio*. From the lists of archer regiments in the Roman army it is clear that, apart from the eastern provinces, the largest single contributor of such units was Thrace, with four *alae* – or four and a half if one includes the *ala Gallorum et Thracum Antiana* – and two cohorts; and it must be noted that the ethnic label 'Thracian' also applied to the inhabitants of the two Moesian provinces.¹⁷ Since Longinus received his *missio* in December 132, after 25 years service, he had been enrolled in 107. This was just after the end of the Second Dacian War of AD 105-106, in which a good many archer regiments are known, or may be inferred

¹⁶ Eck, Holder & Pangerl (note 12) 192-93.

¹⁷ See the remarks by R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography. Studies in the Historia Augusta* (Oxford 1971) 185-86, discussing the origin of the Emperor Maximinus I 'Thrax'.

from epigraphic evidence, to have served; and Roman archers are depicted on Trajan's Column.¹⁸ To be sure, as already mentioned, this regiment of Hamii is not directly attested anywhere before its appearance on the British diploma of AD 122 (*CIL* 16.69); but their participation in the Dacian Wars is perfectly feasible. To pursue this hypothesis further, after the year 107 it may have remained on the Danube, where indeed it could have been based previously. It could then have been brought to Britain for the first time in 118 by the newly appointed governor Q. Pompeius Falco, who was governing Moesia Inferior in 116 and 117, if not earlier; he was very probably transferred to Britain by Hadrian when the emperor visited the Danube provinces in 118. Falco must have needed to strengthen the army of Britain, which had incurred losses during the rebellion there at the start of Hadrian's reign.¹⁹

The Hamii could well have been based at Carvoran for some years before they started rebuilding the fort walls in stone. But some time in the next reign they were transferred to Scotland, following the re-occupation of the Lowlands by the governor Q. Lollius Urbicus.²⁰ They are recorded by three inscriptions at the Antonine Wall fort of Bar Hill:

RIB 1.2166+add., Deo Mar|ti Camulo | [m]ilites coh. [i] |
Hamioru[m] | [sag(ittariorum)?] civ[e]s G[alli?] et? ...]ivi[...].

The dedication to a clearly Gallic god by soldiers in this Syrian regiment, who also perhaps called themselves 'Gallic citizens', may be evidence for further recruitment, as in the case of Longinus, in areas far distant from the homeland.²¹

¹⁸ Cf. K. Strobel, *Untersuchungen zu den Dakerkrigen Trajans. Studien zur Geschichte des mittleren und unteren Donaupraumes in der Hohen Kaiserzeit* (Bonn 1984) 120-21, 126-28, 135-36, 142-43, 145, who finds evidence that several archer regiments, not including *coh. I Hamiorum*, but also the *Palmyreni sagittarii*, fought in Trajan's army. For archers depicted on the column, cf. F. Lepper & S. Frere, *Trajan's Column. A New Edition of the Cichorius Plates* (Gloucester 1988) 106, 108, 160, 167 (sceptical about Strobel's identifications of units serving in the Wars).

¹⁹ *HA, Hadr.* 5.2; Fronto, *De bello Parthico* 2.220 f. van den Hout. Cf. A.R. Birley, 'A new tombstone from Vindolanda', *Britannia* 29 (1998) 299-306; *idem* (note 13) 117-18, also citing epigraphic evidence.

²⁰ Birley (note 13) 136-40.

²¹ The reading is mainly due to L. Keppie, 'Roman inscriptions from Scotland: some additions and corrections to *RIB* I', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 113 (1983) 391-404, at 393-95. The expansions in lines 5-6 are those of the present writer: the suggestion is that the soldiers dedicating this altar further

The other inscriptions are an altar set up by a prefect and the tombstone of another one:

2167, [D]eo Silv[ano | C]aristan[ius | I]ustianu[s] | praef. | [c]oh. I
Hamior(um) | v s l m.; 2172, D(is) M(anibus) | C. Iuli Marcellini
| praef. | coh. I Hamior(um).²²

A second unit, the *cohors I Baetasiorum c.R.*, is also attested at Bar Hill, by *RIB* 1.2169 and 2170, but it is not clear whether the Baetasii preceded or succeeded the Hamii at this fort. At all events, the stay in Scotland of the Hamii ended at latest *c.* AD 160, as it is now agreed that the Antonine Wall was only occupied for about twenty years after its construction began *c.* 140.²³ The Hamii were definitely back at Carvoran by about the year 163 or 164, when their commander dedicated two altars under the governor Calpurnius Agricola:

defined themselves by their ethnic origin. In view of their choice of deity, the patron god of the Remi, it could be that one could restore *civ[er]s G[alli]* (the G is not quite certain). This could have been followed by another ethnic in the plural, cf. *RIB* 1.2148, *cives Italici et Norici*. But it is hard to find a name that matches the surviving traces, read as IVI. Perhaps one could take these as TVM, and just restore *[vo]ltum [s]olverunt*]. For *cives Galli*, cf. A.R. Birley, 'Cives Galli de(ae) Galliae concordisque Britanni: a dedication at Vindolanda', *L'Antiquité Classique* 77 (2008) 171-87. That text is reproduced as *AE* 2007:876 (with some ill-informed scepticism about the reading and interpretation).

²² For Caristianus see *PME* C 83: he was surely from the well-known family at Pisidian Antioch. The second man, C. Julius Marcellinus, *ibid.* I 80, has names that are too indistinctive to reveal his origin. But it should be noted that the dates offered in *PME*, 'exeunte II s.?' and 'II parte II s./III s.' are too late, as the Antonine Wall was no longer occupied then; cf. next note. For the record, it may be mentioned that the prefect commanding the Hamii in AD 132, M. Mussius Concessus, is otherwise unknown; Eck, Holder & Pangerl (note 12) 195 lean towards origin in Africa.

²³ N. Hodgson, 'Were there two Antonine occupations of Scotland?', *Britannia* 26 (1995) 29-49; see esp. p. 34 on the uncertainty whether Hamii were the first or second garrison at Bar Hill. It is tempting to associate with the presence of the Hamii there the burial not far away from the fort of the fifteen-year old Salmanes, whose tombstone was set up by his presumed father, also called Salmanes, *RIB* 1.2182. The name is clearly Semitic.

RIB 1.1792, Deae Suri|ae, sub Calp|urnio Ag[r]i|co[la] leg(ato) Au[g(usti)] | pr(o) pr(aetore), Licinius | [C]lem[ens, praef(ectus) | co]h(ortis) I Ha[miorum]; 1809, [... sub Calpur|ni]o Agri|cola, co(n)s(ulari), | Licinius Cl[e] | mens p[raef(ectus)].²⁴

Two further regimental commanders are recorded at Carvoran. The first is known only from the fragmentary *RIB* 1.1810, [...]*us Agripp[ae] praef. coh. I Hamioru[m...]*, presumably from a religious dedication.²⁵ The second man, 'serving as tribune in the post of prefect by the Emperor's favour', does not mention which regiment he was commanding. But his metrical dedication to *Virgo Caelestis*, identified with, among other deities, the *dea Syria*, allows one to assume that he did indeed hold this position. This famous poem deserves discussion in the context of this paper. It is set out here as verse:

*Imminet Leoni Virgo caeles|ti situ
spicifera iusti in|ventrix urbium conditrix
ex quis muneribus nosse con|tigit deos:
ergo eadem mater divum | Pax Virtus Ceres
dea Syria | lance vitam et iura pensitans.
in caelo visum Syria sidus edi|dit
Libyae colendum: inde | cuncti didicimus. |
ita intellexit numine inductus | tuo
Marcus Caecilius Do|natianus militans
tribunus | in praefecto dono principis.*

Opposite Leo Virgo is in her celestial place,
bearing ears of corn, inventress of justice, foundress of cities,
through which gifts it became possible to know the gods.
Therefore the same being is the Mother of the gods, Peace, Virtue, Ceres,
the Syrian goddess, weighing in the balance life and laws.
Syria brought forth the constellation seen in the sky
to receive worship in Libya: from this we have all learned.
Thus did understand, directed by thy divine spirit,
Marcus Caecilius Donatianus, serving
with tribune's rank in the post of prefect, by the Emperor's favour.

²⁴ For Calpurnius Agricola's dates, Birley (note 13) 155-57. During the absence of the Hamii in Scotland it is probable that Carvoran had been occupied by a small caretaker force of legionaries: cf. *RIB* 1.1779, an altar to Fortuna set up there by Audac. Romanus, 'centurion of the legions VI, XX and II', presumably in each one successively.

²⁵ Accepted as a prefect in *PME* A 282.

In his classic study *Conversion*, A.D. Nock quoted the inscription as an example of ‘a religion in which all humanity joins and a religion communicated of favour by revelation. The detail of this is no doubt due to the movement fostered by the Severan dynasty ..., but the basic idea – that the worship in question is a form (at most the best form, using the deity’s favourite name) of the religion of all men – is widespread.’²⁶ While Nock assumed that the inscription was Severan or later, he did not subscribe to the view, already widespread when he wrote, that the tribune intended to honour the empress Julia Domna by identifying her with the goddess. This interpretation was first put forward by Thomas Hodgkin in 1899 and enthusiastically taken up by Alfred von Domaszewski.²⁷ They were followed by R.G. Collingwood in his catalogue of the inscriptions in the Newcastle society’s collection, and many others, including R.P. Wright in *RIB* 1.²⁸ Although it was emphatically rejected by Joseph Vogt in 1943,

²⁶ A.D. Nock, *Conversion. The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford 1933; paperback reprints 1963 and later) 136.

²⁷ T. Hodgkin, ‘The Carvoran inscription in praise of the Syrian goddess’, *Archaeologia Aeliana* Ser. 2.21 (1899) 288-92; A. von Domaszewski, ‘Virgo Caelestis’, in C. Bezold (ed.), *Festschrift Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Gießen 1906) 861-63, reprinted in *idem, Abhandlungen zur römischen Religion* (Leipzig & Berlin 1909) 148-50, cf. 861=148: ‘Der Triumph des neuen Hannibal verkörpert sich in der Verehrung seiner Gattin Julia Domna als Virgo Caelestis, der Stadtgöttin des alten Karthagos.’

²⁸ R.G. Collingwood, ‘Roman inscriptions and sculptures belonging to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne’, *Archaeologia Aeliana* Ser. 4.2 (1926) 59-124, at p. 71 n. 55: ‘The poem is really in honour of Julia Domna, the Syrian wife of the Libyan (African) Emperor Septimius Severus. Julia Domna is identified with the Virgin, whom coins of Severus show riding on the Lion, and it seems to be the case that this Syrian constellation-worship travelled to Africa with the Phoenicians: Dido, in Virgil, worships the “law-giver Ceres”. The statue with which this inscription was connected, therefore, showed Julia Domna, with a wreath of ears of corn, riding on a lion and holding a balance, probably with other accessories. Donatianus records the fact that though he only held the command proper to a prefect, he had been given the brevet rank of tribune.’ R.P. Wright in *RIB* 1.1791 reproduces this text as far as “law-giver Ceres”, then adapts the remainder: ‘The representation, probably a statue, with which this inscription was presumably connected must have shown Julia Domna with a wreath of ears of corn, standing on a lion and holding a balance, probably with other accessories. Although the Hamii, worshippers of *dea Syria*, were in garrison at Carvoran in the middle of the second century, the *dea Syria* emphasized in l. 6 is the personification of Julia Domna, to whom the poem throughout implicitly refers (see

Jacques Toutain in 1951, Ilse Marie Mundle in 1961 and Erich Kettenhofen in 1979,²⁹ Hodgkin's theory still repeatedly crops up,³⁰ even though there is no mention of the empress in the text. In 1939 Eric Birley had indeed

Hodgkin loc. cit.). For a dedication to Julia Domna as Caelestis see *CIL* 13.6671 (Moguntiacum).'

²⁹ J. Vogt, 'Das Puniertum und die Dynastie des Septimius Severus', in J. Vogt, (ed.), *Rom und Karthago* (Leipzig 1943) 346-66, at 362: 'Domaszewski hat dieses Gebet ohne ersichtlichen Grund auf Iulia Domna als Caelestis bezogen'; J. Toutain, 'Communication sur Julia Domna invoquée sous le nom de Dea Caelestis', *BACTH* 44-45 (1943/44/45) [1951], 306-11, at 308: 'Mais ni dans son texte, ni dans les circonstances de sa découverte, rien ne justifie à nos yeux les conclusions que Domaszewski a cru devoir en tirer ... Il nous semble que dans ce commentaire tout est hypothèse pure, sinon même fantaisie'; I. Mundle, 'Dea Caelestis in der Religionspolitik des Septimius Severus', *Historia* 10 (1961) 228-37, concluding, at 230, 'Die Inschrift steht in keinerlei Beziehung zur Kaiserin Julia Domna'; cf. E. Kettenhofen, *Die syrischen Augustae in der historischen Überlieferung: ein Beitrag zum Problem der Orientalisierung* (Bonn 1979) 98-101, and G.H. Halsberghe, 'Le culte de dea Caelestis', *ANRW* 2.17.4 (1984) 2203-223; although at 2211 he cites the Carvoran inscription still as *CIL* 7.759 and attributes the idea to Domaszewski, not Hodgkin; he names Toutain and Vogt as the only ones to disagree, but then adds that Mundle has sufficiently shown that Domaszewski's interpretation is unfounded.

³⁰ Cf. E. Harris & J.R. Harris, *The Oriental Cults in Roman Britain* (Leiden 1965) 105 f.; M.J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis. The Myth and the Cult* (London 1977) 138-39; 210: 'Her [Julia Domna's] religious interests were wide. Donatianus' poem from Carvoran identifies her with Dea Syria, and Virgo (i.e. Juno) Caelestis, the North African tutelary deity'; M. Hörig, 'Dea Syria – Atargatis', *ANRW* 2.17.3 (1984) 1536-581, at 1574 f. n. 303; M. Henig, *Religion in Roman Britain* (London 1984) 79: 'Caecilius Donatianus' poem to Julia Domna as Cybele-Caelestis'; 110: 'The poem ... identifies her with the Empress Julia Domna, but it is no mere empty rhetoric. Religious enthusiasm and loyalty gush forth from the poem as well as loyalty to the regime. There is also a theogeny which shows that Cybele, like Isis, claimed universal sovereignty ...'; L. Allason-Jones, 'Visions and dreams in Roman Britain', *Archaeologia Aeliana* Ser. 5.25 (1997) 21-25, at 22: 'This dedication is ostensibly to the goddess, Virgo Caelestis, but also identifies Julia Domna, the Syrian wife of the Libyan emperor, Septimius Severus, with Caelestis. The poem is a remarkable exercise in sycophancy – Marcus Caecilius Donatianus was clearly trying to curry favour with the Emperor and Empress whilst they were in Britain.' Breeze (note 8) 281: 'From this site [Carvoran] there is also a very remarkable metrical dedication to the Virgin of the Zodiac, with reference to Julia Domna.'

assigned the inscription 'to the time of Marcus Aurelius at latest',³¹ since he followed the then prevalent assumption that the Antonine Wall was occupied as late as the reign of Commodus,³² and thus believed that the Hamii might not have moved to Bar Hill until the 160s. In later contributions he stressed that Donatianus' 'names, and the fact that his verses link the goddess with worship in Libya, combine to show that his home was in Africa, and there is no reason to follow Thomas Hodgkin ... in supposing the poem to have been intended as an implied honour to Julia Domna.'³³ Donatianus' African origin was supported in detail by Michael Jarrett,³⁴ and Roger Tomlin dealt with the matter concisely in the addenda and corrigenda to *RIB* 1.³⁵ To spell out the significance of the dedicatory's African origin: the goddess Tanit, given the Roman name Juno Caelestis, was the presiding deity of Carthage and of Roman Africa generally.

As to the date, *dono principis* at the end of the poem ought to mean that Donatianus served under a single emperor, for example under Marcus Aurelius between 169 and 176, or under Commodus between 180 and 192 – after all, the metre would not have been spoiled if Donatianus had written *dono principum*. Theoretically a third-century date is possible,³⁶ although the Hamii seem to have been replaced at Carvoran in the course of that century. That is the probable date of an altar, *RIB* 1.1795, set up by an *imag(inifer)* of the *coh. II Delmatarum*, the regiment listed here in the *Notitia Dignitatum: cohors secunda Dalmatarum Magnis* (ND Occ. 40.43). Perhaps the Hamii were wiped out in the defeat of Albinus' army at the

³¹ E. Birley, 'The Beaumont inscription, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, and the garrison of Hadrian's Wall', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* Ser. 2.39 (1939) 190-226, at 217.

³² Cf. e.g. R.G. Collingwood, *Roman Britain*, in G. Clark (ed.), *Oxford History of England* 1 (1936) 153-54.

³³ E. Birley (note 8) 195; the same point is made by *idem*, 'The deities of Roman Britain', *ANRW* 2.18.1 (1986) 3-112, at 78-80.

³⁴ M.G. Jarrett, 'The African contribution to the imperial equestrian service', *Historia* 12 (1963) 209-26, at 211; *idem*, 'An album of equestrians from North Africa in the emperors' service', *Epigraphische Studien* 9 (1972) 146-232, at 165.

³⁵ R.S.O. Tomlin, 'Addenda and corrigenda', in *RIB* 1, 2nd ed. (Stroud 1995) 751-838, at 789. It is to be hoped that the emphatic statement by B. Levick, *Julia Domna: Syrian Empress* (London & New York 2007) 133-35, will help to dispose of Hodgkin's theory.

³⁶ This seems to be favoured by G.R. Stephens, 'The metrical inscription from Carvoran, *RIB* 1791', *Archaeologia Aeliana* Ser. 5.12 (1984) 149-56.

battle of Lugdunum in February 197.³⁷ But it cannot, of course, be excluded that they were simply transferred to another station when Severus recovered Britain.

As well as the Syrian Goddess, called Atargatis in her own country, whose cult centre was Hierapolis,³⁸ the Hamii worshipped another deity from their immediate homeland: *RIB* 1.1780, Carvoran, a tiny portable altar, is inscribed

De(a)e Hammi(ae) Gabi(...) (or Sabi(nus?) f(ecit).

A rather similar altar found at Vindolanda, some seven miles east of Carvoran, during excavations in the *vicus* conducted by Justin Blake, may also have been dedicated to this goddess. It was read by Roger Tomlin as DEHMA|EHNIS, with MA in the first line ligatured, interpreted as 'perhaps an illiterate mis-cutting of *deis ma|ternis*.'³⁹ But the bottom part of an I survives after the ligature and one could thus read, instead: *de(ae) Hami|(a)e Havis*. One further trace of the Hamii is a tombstone with the relief of an archer from a neighbouring fort on Hadrian's Wall, Housesteads. David Smith argued that it must have portrayed a soldier from a different archer regiment.⁴⁰ But his arguments have not won acceptance. There is no reason why this man could not have been out-stationed from Carvoran to Housesteads.⁴¹

As a tailpiece, a comment may be offered on the place-names *Magna* and Carvoran. The former, *Magnis*, presumably locative, in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (40.43) and the *Ravenna Cosmography* (107.11), is taken to be

³⁷ On the battle, cf. A.R. Birley, *Septimius Severus the African Emperor* (London & New York 1988) 124-25.

³⁸ See now especially Lightfoot (note 7). On the Carvoran inscription, at p. 80 she opts for 'probably late 2nd c(entury)', but at 537 for '? A.D. 197-217'.

³⁹ R.S.O. Tomlin, 'Roman Britain in 2008. III. Inscriptions', *Britannia* 40 (2009) 313-63, at 317, with drawing (fig. 5, not showing the trace of I at the end of line 1). The altar was unfortunately unstratified.

⁴⁰ D.J. Smith, 'The archer's tombstone from Housesteads', *Archaeologia Aeliana* Ser. 4.46 (1968) 284-91.

⁴¹ See J.C. Coulston & E.J. Phillips, *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani* 1.6. *Hadrian's Wall West of the North Tyne, and Carlisle* (Oxford 1988) n. 200 and plate 56, with long discussion, 83-84, ending: 'As to the archer himself, he can only have served in the *cohors I Hamiorum*. Date 2nd or 3rd century AD, with the latter slightly preferred on style grounds.'

'British **magno-* (plural **magni*), from which comes Welsh *maen* (pl. *mein*) "stone, rock".⁴² An alternative explanation is that it is simply Latin, *magna castra*, and refers to the size of an earlier, larger fort, the presence of which was detected by aerial photography.⁴³ As for the modern name, in 1930, R.G. Collingwood suggested that the south to north road terminating at Carvoran, the Maiden Way, was so-called because of the Celtic name for the fort: 'a Maiden Way (which of course has nothing to do with the Celtic *Mai dun*, high ridge) means a way leading to a Maiden castle; which this one does, for it leads to Carvoran, and Carvoran must be *Caer forwyn*, the castle of the maiden, *morwyn*.'⁴⁴ It is perhaps fanciful to suggest that *Caer forwyn*, castle of the maiden, might be a post-Roman recollection of the castle with a shrine of the *Virgo Caelestis*, the 'heavenly maiden'.

John Spaul claims that '[t]he reason why a unit of archers should have been stationed at Carvoran is not immediately obvious;' he speculated that the region 'may have been specially favoured by deer and wild fowl and this would make it a source of meat for the troops stationed on the Wall. Perhaps the Hamian archers were principally employed as hunters.' This is a very odd suggestion. Venison and gamebirds were not normally major items in soldiers' diet; and, as the Vindolanda tablets show, prefects of other regiments went in for hunting, with their own huntsmen, *venatores*.⁴⁵ Carvoran is almost at the central point of Hadrian's Wall, so that archers from the regiment could have been moved readily either to west or to east to back up other units in an emergency – by the same token, their base on the Antonine Wall, Bar Hill, is more or less at the centre of that frontier line. Further, Carvoran's position at the road junction of the Maiden Way and Stanegate and at the top of the steep

⁴² A.L.F. Rivet & C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London 1979) 407-08.

⁴³ G.D.B. Jones, in *The Eleventh Pilgrimage of Hadrian's Wall*, compiled by C.M. Daniels (Newcastle upon Tyne 1989) 41-43 and fig. 15.

⁴⁴ R.G. Collingwood, 'Five notes', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* Ser. 2.30 (1930) 116-24, of which n. 1, 116-17, is on 'The Maiden Way'; he adds that 'My attention was called to this derivation by our member Mr. E.B. Birley.' The discussion of the road was elaborated and expanded in *idem*, 'Two Roman mountain roads', *ibid.* 37 (1937) 1-12, at 10.

⁴⁵ Spaul, *Cohors*² (note 3) 409. For hunting and huntsmen at Vindolanda, see e.g. A.R. Birley, *Garrison Life at Vindolanda. A Band of Brothers* (Stroud 2002) 147-51.

bank going down to the valley of the Tipalt also made it an ideal place to station the only regiment of archers in the province.⁴⁶

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⁴⁶ In a final note it may be recalled that shortly after the start of the First World War, Collingwood was spotted by a group of Northumbrian miners while surveying Carvoran and reported to the police as a German spy; he spent several hours in Haltwhistle police station, but was released when letters from the prominent landowner, Mrs Nathaniel Clayton, were found in his pocket; cf. his own account, given to those attending the Pilgrimage of Hadrian's Wall in 1920, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne*, Ser. 3.9 (1920) 289-90. He refers briefly to the same incident in his *Autobiography* (Oxford 1939) 152. As James Connolly kindly informs me, Collingwood, then aged 24, had been commissioned by Professor Francis Haverfield to survey a number of Roman forts; his arrest took place on 30 August 1914. One may well suppose that Carvoran fort would have looked like a suitable place for notional German invaders to establish a gun-platform, commanding the Newcastle-Carlisle road in the valley below.

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