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THE DIVISION OF BRITAIN IN AD 197

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On the basis of an inscription found in Italy, it has been argued that Britain still constituted a single province in AD 212, and that thus it was not divided into two provinces in AD 197, as Herodian claimed (III, 8, 2). The inscription is CIL XIV 2508. It reads:

[C.] Iulio Aspro
 cos.
 praetori curatori
 viae Appiae sodali August[..
 trib. [pleb.] quaestori
 provinc. Africae curat.
 aedium sacrarum
 provincia Britannia
 patrono

It is one of a group of about a dozen inscriptions found at a villa in the vicinity of Tusculum, which lay about 23 km. south-east of Rome. The villa was evidently the property of the Iulii Asperi, of whom the two best-known were the father and son who were consuls together in AD 212 (duobus Aspris coss.). The consulship was also later held by a grandson, as appears from CIL VI 31716 which, although fragmentary, indicates the three generations as follows:

| | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|--|
| C.Iulius Asper | C. Iulius Galerius Asper (son) | C. Iulius Camillus Galerius Asper (grandson) |
| bis. cos. | cos. ord. | cos. |
| praef. urbi | pontifex | patricius(?) |
| | | VIIvir epulonum |
| | | lupercus |

(The grandson does not seem to be commemorated at the Tusculan villa.)

For some reason, Borghesi (followed by CIL and PIR) chose to believe that all the dedicatory inscriptions at the Tusculan villa were set up to the son, C. Iulius Galerius Asper. A more careful analysis of the stones suggests the following:

CIL XIV 2505, 2506, 2507, 2508 and 2509 (= ILS 1156) were all set up to C.Iulius Asper, by various individuals or organizations, on the lines of 2508 (given above). He held office probably in this order:

- 1) curator aedium sacrarum. As Pflaum suggested (ad PIR² J 334) this is surely a civic office at Tusculum.
- 2) quaestor provinciae Africae
- 3) tribunus plebis
- 4) sodalis Augustalis
- 5) praetor
- 6) curator viae Appiae
- 7) cos. designatus, 2509
 consul (during or after consulship) 2505, 2506, 2507, 2508
 (cf. also XIV 2512, C. Iulio Aspro cos. candidato)

In contrast, XIV 2510 was set up to C. Iulius Galerius Asper. It reads:

[C.] Iulio Galerio
Aspro
pr., tr. plebis
quaest. provinciae
Africae
cur. aed. sacrar.

XIV 2511 is similar, but fragmentary.

It seems quite clear that both father and son were commemorated at the villa, but while C. Iulius Asper served as curator viae Appiae and sodalis Augustalis, C. Iulius Galerius Asper appears as neither. (Was it perhaps because both served as quaestor provinciae Africae that Borghesi thought that all of these inscriptions referred to the same man? But it would have been very odd if virtually all of the inscriptions at the villa referred only to the younger man, when his father was so much more distinguished, being twice consul and praefectus urbi, as XIV 2514 indicates.)

If CIL XIV 2508 were set up in AD 212, it would then have read cos. II (if the object of the dedication were C. Iulius Asper), or it would have read C. Iulius Galerius Asper (if the son were in question). As it is, the inscriptions XIV 2505-9 can only have been set up just before, during, or just after the first (suffect) consulship of C. Iulius Asper. Since he was cos. II ord. in AD 212, his first consulship probably fell in the reign of Commodus. Thus XIV 2508 dates before AD 197, and is irrelevant to the question of the division of Britain.

As was pointed out 30 years ago¹, the reference by Herodian to the division of Britain after the defeat of Clodius Albinus is no mere mechanical repetition of the division of Syria after the defeat of Pescennius Niger, since Herodian does not mention the latter. The simplest solution is to argue that Severus did indeed divide Britain, but in a different fashion from that which prevailed later. He hived off a southern province (Britannia Superior), with London as its capital. This had only one legion, II Augusta at Caerleon, and was governed by a legate of praetorian rank. This left a consular province in the north (Britannia Inferior) with its capital at York and legions at Chester and York. Three consular governors of this province are known – Virius Lupus, Valerius Pudens and Alfenus Senecio. Unfortunately, inscriptions recording them in Britain naturally do not mention the name of the province. Only when we have an inscription recording one of them, found outside Britain and naming the province precisely, will we learn for certain whether there was a consular Britannia Inferior (see Map 1).

Severus divided Britain for the same reason as he divided Syria: each had been governed by a rival for the throne, and in each province disgruntled supporters of those rivals will have been regarded as a potential threat. In each case Severus left a two-legion province covering the vulnerable frontier area, with a one-legion province in the rear as partial counterweight. Having made his own bid for power from the base of Pannonia Superior, he obviously felt confident enough of his support there to leave it as the sole remaining three-legion province. Caracalla did not have the same confidence, in the face of the support which seems to have been given to Geta. He therefore moved the boundary between Pannonia Superior and Pannonia Inferior, to make each a two-legion province and thus less of a threat to his own position. His apprehension of such a threat will also explain his movement of the provincial boundary in Britain, from south to north of Chester. As constituted by Severus, his consular Britannia Inferior had not only two legions but also a large auxiliary force, probably at least 40 units. This was potentially a serious threat. Transferring a legion to (now consular) Britannia Superior still left a sizeable auxiliary force to secure the frontier zone of (the now praetorian) Britannia Inferior, while in

¹ JRS 57, 1967, 61–64 (= J. C. Mann, *Britain and the Roman Empire*, 1996, 141–145).

any really serious emergency, there would still be three legions in the island. On the other hand, as with the Pannonias, neither of the British provinces now offered such a large force to a potential usurper.

The boundary between the two provinces will now have run from the west coast north of Chester to the east coast south of Lincoln, thus including in Britannia Inferior not only Lincoln but also the Iceni and the Corieltauvi, as well as the new civitas which was probably formed – with its oppidum at Durobrivae (Water Newton) – after the drainage of the Fens. The new legionary dispositions are recorded by Cassius Dio (55,23,2–6): II Augusta and XX Vv in Britannia Superior, VI Victrix in Britannia Inferior (See Map 2).

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Map 1. Britannia AD 197 – c. AD 215



Map 2. Britannia c. AD 215 – AD 297