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ERIC BIRLEY

Cohors I Tungrorum and the Oracle
of the Clarian Apollo*

Dedicated to Herbert Nesselhauf

HERMANN DESSAU gave, under ILS 3270, three inscriptions which had been found respectively at Corinium in Dalmatia (CIL III 2880), on the border between Numidia and Mauretania Caesariensis (CIL VIII 8351), and at Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall in Britain (now RIB 1579). All three carry the same simple text, with minor variations in their abbreviation or spelling: *diis deabusque secundum interpretationem oraculi Clari Apollinis* – that is to say, «To the gods and goddesses, in accordance with the exposition of the oracle of Apollo at Claros.» Between the wars, a fourth example of the same dedication was found in Sardinia (NSA 1928, 254 = AE 1929, 156 = SORGIU, ILSard 42).

As far as I know, nobody hitherto has ventured to discuss what the occasion may have been for these four inscriptions to be set up. Yet it seems certain that texts identical in their wording, but from four widely separated provinces of the Roman empire, must have been dedicated at one and the same time, and specifically at the orders of someone who had received a reply from the oracle, requiring inscriptions in that form to be set up. Who was it who asked the oracle for an answer, and in what period?

The Sardinian inscription, when it was first published, was assigned by the style of its lettering to the time of Claudius. Such an early dating, however, is untenable: for the British inscription comes from a fort on Hadrian's Wall – and excavations have demonstrated that that fort was not built before the second stage in the construction of the new artificial frontier, nearer A.D. 125 than the year of Hadrian's visit to Britain, three years previously. Moreover, the time of Hadrian, too, is too early, for at Housesteads the inscription adds that it was set up by *coh(ors) I Tungrorum*.

As I pointed out first in JRS 22, 1932, 59, the forts on Hadrian's Wall were not occupied by the same *alae* or cohorts continuously from start to finish. On the contrary, some of the forts are shown by inscriptions to have been held by two or three different units, during the long period between Hadrian and the composition (at whatever date) of the section *per lineam valli* in the «Notitia Dignitatum». Further-

* An earlier version of this paper, in German, was printed in *Germania* 23, 1939, 189 f.

more, it can be shown that some units were transferred more than once from fort to fort, and that that was the case with *coh. I Tungrorum*. That cohort was certainly in Britain in Domitian's time, for as Tacitus records (Agricola 36), two Tungrian cohorts shared with four Batavian cohorts in Agricola's victory at Mons Graupius. Its station in that period, and in the following decades, is not known; though the military diploma for A.D. 103 (CIL XVI 48) attests it, as *I Tungrorum milliaria*, as a unit in the army of Britain. The diplomas for A.D. 122 and 124 (CIL XVI 69 and 70) also show it in Britain, though now without the epithet *milliaria*. The reason for the omission of that epithet has become clear, as the result of the discovery of a diploma for Noricum (CIL XVI 174), assignable to the period A.D. 129/138, which attests the presence in that province of a vexillation of the cohort; that is to say, the parent unit now counted only as a quingenary cohort in the army of Britain. A fragmentary inscription, found a few years ago at the Wall fort at Carrawburgh, nearly six miles east of Housesteads, attests the presence of *coh. I Tungrorum* there under Hadrian (JRS 56, 1966, 218): and Carrawburgh fort is the right size for a quingenary cohort, whereas Housesteads afforded the accommodation for a *cohors milliaria peditata*.

By the time of Antoninus Pius the cohort was once more at full milliary strength, as is shown by a building-record which it set up at Castlecary on the Antonine Wall in Scotland (RIB 2155): *imp(eratori) Caes(ari) T(ito) Ael(io) Ant(onino) Aug(usto) Pio p(atr) p(atr)iae, coh(ors) I Tungrorum fecit (milliaria)* – the unusual position of the symbol ∞ for *milliaria* perhaps stressing its recent reversion to that strength, with the return of the vexillation from Noricum, as Dr R. W. DAVIES has pointed out recently (Epigraphische Studien 4, 1967, 110). It has been thought, indeed, that at some other time during the Roman occupation of what is now Scotland, the cohort was at Cramond on the Firth of Forth, just outside Edinburgh; but Dr DAVIES has shown (Archaeological Journal 125, 1969, 96) that the inscription supposed to record its presence there, RIB 2135, should in reality be assigned to its sister unit, *coh. II Tungrorum*. At Housesteads, all of its inscriptions seem assignable to the third century, and it ought therefore to be not earlier than the time of Severus that it set up that dedication with which we are concerned.

There seems to be no record of the oracle at Claros having been consulted by any specific emperor, but it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that no person less eminent than the emperor himself could have been responsible for taking steps to have the oracle's instructions complied with so widely, and in so many different parts of the empire, and by a unit of the Roman army too.

It is well known that the oracle at Claros was still active in the third century (cf. RE 11, 551), but there does not appear to be any evidence for any particular ruler of the Roman empire having consulted it in that period. All the same, it may not be held unreasonable to suggest that the ruler in question was Caracalla, and the date of his consultation A.D. 213. In that year, Caracalla was sick in body and in mind, as Cassius Dio records (77, 15, 5 f.), and in an effort to obtain relief he

sought the help of all the most powerful deities. The only gods that Dio mentions by name are Apollo Grannus, Aesculapius and Serapis; but the Clarian Apollo, manifestly linked by *interpretatio Romana* with Apollo Grannus, would seem a particularly appropriate one to consult.

It may be remembered, incidentally, that it was in that same year, A.D. 213, that a number of cohorts in the north of Britain set up their inscriptions *pro pietate ac devotione communi* in honour of Caracalla. In 1934, when I published the example from Chesterholm (*Vindolanda*), in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th series, XI, 127 f. (now RIB 1705), I was inclined to think that it, and the other inscriptions set up with the same formula, might be taken as evidence that there had recently been something less than undoubted loyalty to Caracalla shown by the units concerned. That may still, I suppose, have been the case; but if I am right in suggesting A.D. 213 as the date of the Housesteads inscription and its counterparts from Africa, Dalmatia and Sardinia, some people might well think that those inscriptions represent a corollary to the dedications ordered as a result of a reply which Caracalla had received from the oracle at Claros.

