

## ROMAN LONDON AND BRITISH INDIA

There have been many conquests and invasions during the course of history. Most of them have involved either mass invasion and take-over of the land by virtually a new set of inhabitants who have absorbed what was left of the old population, or the converse of this, the taking over of the government of a country by new rulers who become absorbed themselves into the country they have conquered.

At least twice in history events have taken a different course – the conquest of a not very organised country by an efficient military system, followed and backed up by a very efficient administration by a small number of men who become admired and imitated by those they administer but who always retain their connection with their homeland:— The Romans here and the British in India.

The comparison between the Romans and the British can be pushed to extreme lengths. Look at the hundreds of portrait busts of the senior Roman administrators. Who do they remind you of? Surely not the Italians you met on holiday! Look at the Indian Civil Service, the old India Office, the Dominion and Colonial Office, or for that matter the top echelons of the Treasury, the Ministry of Defence or the Home Office.

The comparison, however, can lead to a practical and helpful understanding of the early history of England.

A number of recent excavations and publications have begun to give us quite a good idea of Roman London and indeed Roman Britain, which vividly points the parallel with British India.

In each case a military, not to say imperial, power with a sophisticated organisation entered a country with a very loose central government, or one which barely existed. The inhabitants, while not savages, were much less technically advanced than the newcomers.

The problems therefore were similar. So were some at least of the solutions.

The Romans, who intended to conquer, pacify and trade with the British, arrived in the South and penetrated as far inland as was needed to give a safe hinterland.

The British, having a sub-continent and not just an island before them, landed and established bases at Madras, Calcutta and near Bombay. None of these were established cities, and nor was London. Prosperous native settlements however quickly grew up in the shadow of

the Pax Romana or the Pax Britannica, and this was just what was needed by the traders who followed the Army.

To the Native States just beyond the edge of established order this presented a constant temptation for riots, plundering incursions and full scale tribal wars.

In each case the Army had no alternative but to extend the area under control, sometimes by direct conquest and sometimes by treaty with the Native States.

Britain being so much smaller than India the time scale for pacification was very much shorter. This had a curious result. The major rebellion under Boudicca occurred at an early stage in the Roman occupation, while in India the Mutiny took longer to come to a head.

Both India and Roman Britain had on their northern borders fierce, war-like and unruly tribesmen, occupying land which at the time had no obvious economic value and was not at all attractive for a takeover bid.

The solution in each case was once more remarkably similar — to set a boundary which the tribesmen could be discouraged from crossing. The Romans built Hadrian's Wall, and rather further ahead, a less heavily defended line — the Antonine Wall. In India we laid down the Durand line, beyond which a much looser form of control was exercised, right up to the Frontier itself which was defended by isolated forts. Modern fire-power made it unnecessary for either line along the North West Frontier to be defended by a continuous wall.

Nevertheless, the Picts and Scots in the one place and the Afridis, Wazirs and Yusuf Khel in the other would have been instantly recognisable to either Army.

So close is the parallel that the British Army has actually trained me in identical exercises, in the one case to supply the North West Frontier forts from Peshawar and in the other, in a post-war Supplementary Reserve exercise, to supply Hadrian's Wall from their actual Supply Depot in Corstorpitum — now known as Corbridge.

The parallel in the way events developed towards the end of Imperial rule is not quite so close. The reason appears to be that Rome was a city, not a country. As the Romans conquered Italy they extended the duties and privileges of citizenship to all Italians who would take it up. When they came to Gaul and Greece and Spain they continued the process and eventually all inhabitants of the Empire, other than slaves and freedmen, were automatically Roman Citizens. The inhabitants of Britain or the Middle East had just as much reason to

consider themselves Romans as any inhabitants of Italy. Very few of the Roman Emperors were born in Rome, or indeed Italy. At least three came from Britain, although with the exception of Constantine who was not born in Britain but was proclaimed at York, we do not know if they were born here.

Consequently there was no internal threat to the Roman yoke — people in Britain were Romans.

Constantine had so little feeling for Rome itself that he set up his main capital at Constantinople, then called Byzantium. The other Emperors, Albinus and Maximus started their reigns in Britain, though neither managed to gain control of the whole Empire before being slain by another claimant. Although I do not know their ancestry there is no particular reason to suppose they were Italians, let alone native Romans.

The threat to Roman dominion came from outside the borders of the Empire. It was overthrown, both in Britain and elsewhere, by invaders.

In India on the other hand the native inhabitants were taught to value freedom as British subjects, but not to consider themselves as Englishmen or Scots, let alone as citizens of London. The result was inevitable. No Indian subject could reasonably expect to become Prime Minister of Great Britain, or even to become Lord Chancellor, in spite of the number of them being called to the English Bar. Any Indian subject with political ambition must hope in the long run to hold high office in an independent India. The threat to the British Raj was always internal.

Having considered the countrywide implications the time has come to consider Roman London. We must examine how our knowledge of life in India under the Raj can throw light both on life and on the local geography of Roman London.

In their origins Bombay, Madras and Calcutta were much like London in that there was little or nothing there. However, the enormous populations which later inhabited those cities distort any parallel with Roman Britain as the present populations of each of them probably exceed that of the whole of Roman Britain, Gaul and Spain put together. For true comparison we must look at Indian places which are of a comparable order of magnitude, when we can at once discern a common pattern.

First there is a kind of market town, much bigger than a village but having little or no internal organisation. It is crowded, insanitary and unruly. Its inhabitants are mostly very poor but some have not inconsiderable wealth.

If the Army is not already there as the stimulus of the trading area, it has to come to take charge of the situation. It selects a well drained, salubrious area, upwind from the bazaar and builds itself comfortable houses for the officers and well appointed barracks for the troops. It would of course be very bad for discipline to have them alongside the bazaar, but nevertheless they must be close enough to send a Platoon or Company in at the double in case of trouble.

Such is, in India the cantonment, in the middle of which is Flagstaff House — the residence of the officer commanding. At first he will have a Brigade or more in support, including in India native troops, or in the Roman Army, Auxiliaries.

Now let us look at what happened in London. For military reasons the Romans constructed a bridge. That and the probable pre-existing ford, made it a focal spot for local traders. There rapidly grew up a bazaar at the north end of the Bridge on the gravel hillock. The south end of the Bridge was too damp. The place was still of no great consequence but it did provide access to local supplies.

So what did the Romans do? They built a cantonment, up-wind of the 'bazaar' and about a third of a mile from it — quite near enough for control, but far enough to make unauthorised visits by the troops easily detectable by the Military Police. It was near enough also to make 'living out' passes available once things were settled and peaceful and some of the troops were married to local girls.

The earliest remains of the Roman Fort so far discovered date from about 120 AD, but there was a garrison in or around London at least from 44 or 45 AD. It would seem therefore that the camp or cantonment was an unfortified as were the cantonments in India. The troops, living there in substantial numbers, were their own protection. You do not need a fort until you reduce the size of the garrison. I suggest therefore that further discoveries by the archaeologists may disclose that a camp, which lasted for 80 years before being fortified, contained comfortable quarters for the officers and perhaps even for the troops, rather than the Roman equivalent of 'tented accommodation' or even 'huted accommodation'. Excavations in other parts of Britain have shown many examples of each kind of establishment, although the ones which survive best are naturally those with substantial earth fortifications established either in unpacified country such as the Northern Frontier or in the second century or later, when most places, including London, were fortified.

At least it would appear that Stage I of the Roman occupation corresponded rather closely to the similar stage in the military occupation of India.

Stage II also has common features. On the military side the Army is required in more troublesome areas in the North and West of the country, whether England or India. The Legion, Division or Brigade is withdrawn leaving a depot with a small garrison, a battalion at the most or perhaps only a Depot Battalion.

With smaller manpower it needs better static defences. Consequently in Roman London the Fort is constructed about AD120, but I am convinced that it was constructed in an existing military location. It certainly would have been in India.

With the decline in the military presence there is a concomitant rise in the Civil Establishment.

And where do you find this on the ground? Well the Roman (or British Indian) Civil Service has taken over the Administration. There are also Roman (or British) businessmen and to keep up with them the native bazaar is now organised on a wide spectrum of types of business, from banking to street peddlars. There are now Civil Lines and a Forum as well as Law Courts. The Civilians require one or more Temples or Churches. These are all near or in the 'bazaar', by the original settlement.

Flagstaff House in the cantonment or Fort is now occupied by a Major or Lieutenant-Colonel or his Roman equivalent. Who then is the real authority? It is now the Provincial Governor or the Commissioner of the District. And where can you expect to find him? On the edge of the Civil Lines, not far from the Law Courts, in the most salubrious and picturesque site available, but not in the cantonment. So where was Government House in London? Just exactly where you would expect, on a sunny south-facing gravel terrace between the Civil Lines and the river, under what is now Bush Lane and Cannon Street Station. The Civil Lines lay on each side of the Walbrook and to the north of the Forum and were occupied by Romans and by British who had adopted a Roman way of life, as is shown by the numerous mosaic floors and the several public bath-houses since found in those areas. Most of the houses were of 'modern' construction, built since the Boudiccan sacking of the town, but doubtless some pre-Boudiccan houses survived and were no doubt treated with some respect and had a reputation for being haunted.

Exactly the same has happened in India. In the built-up areas of the towns occupied by civil officials of all ranks there are many surviving pre-Mutiny bungalows, well-built and still quite splendid to live in, but, particularly in Meerut where many of the events of the Mutiny took place, having a long history of strange occurrences. Not everybody will live in them. I cannot quote an actual authority for that, in London, but the Younger Pliny tells just such a story about a house

in Athens, and the events of the Boudiccan Revolt were even more horrifying than those of the Mutiny.

Stage III is the beginning of the decay of the central power. This did not mean the decay of civilised living. This continued in London for 250 or 300 years from the start of the breakdown, which I take to be about 200 AD. In India central power has not decayed yet, and thanks to a general rise in world standards I hope it never will.

The decay of the central power in Roman Britain did however mean a general breakdown in law and order. In about 200 AD the wall was extended the whole way round the Roman city, though it was not completed in the south until the fourth century. It of course became of greater and greater importance as the troops withdrew to the North and West and themselves adopted a static defensive role as is shown by the great proliferation of larger and smaller forts and the institution for the first time of coastal defences in the third and fourth centuries in place of the *classis Britannicus*, the original Roman British Fleet. The walls became imperative once the legions had been recalled to Rome and as long as there was anything left worth defending.

In India there have been many sad signs of a similar breakdown, although unless an external threat develops there is hope that it may not go all the way.

And now what was daily life like in Roman London? Here the parallels help quite a lot. There are many of us who have had experience of British India and I suggest that they know just what life was like in Roman London.

In the first place communication with Italy, or whatever country happened to be the homeland of the representatives of the occupying power, was slow. Thanks to the very efficient Roman Government Courier Service official communications between Rome and London were very nearly as quick as the telegraph service to India. The ordinary postal service was in each case slow and wars in other parts of the Empire could make it slower.

The Romans, like the British, therefore felt thrown back onto their own resources, both as to decision making and as to cultural activities. As servants were cheap and plentiful, or in the case of slaves virtually free, there was plenty of time to follow one's own bent. I suggest that, as in British India, Roman life in Britain was comfortable, reasonably enjoyable, but a little formal and provincial. Here and there, however, I have no doubt that there were brilliant eccentrics, who used their leisure to produce excellent examples of learning, literature and art, and even philosophy.

Some of the native Britons no doubt adopted Roman life-styles though it must have taken time before they were fully accepted as social equals. Time, however, was on their side as the Romans were in Britain about twice as long as the British were in India, and towards the end a very high proportion of the ruling class must have been of mixed blood as there were few complications of colour to rub in differences.

There is a curious absence in Roman London, as so far uncovered, of recreational facilities. The ruins of any Roman town in Italy, Greece, Asia Minor, Gaul or Spain all contain the remains of a Theatre, an Arena, or a Stadium, and often all three, and this applies also to their equivalents in Britain. But London was the largest town in Britain and so far has not produced any evidence for public sport or culture.

London was basically a civilian town and it may be that its inhabitants were not very interested in such matters. It is difficult to understand however that the Romans in Britain did not organise active sport and entertainment for the Army. The British in India certainly did and there are numerous cricket grounds, football pitches, polo grounds, race courses and sports clubs, which will leave permanent traces on the ground.

In South India there are cantonments which have been abandoned for about two hundred years, where these establishments are the most prominent traces of occupation left.

When we look to other parts of Roman Britain the Arena or Amphitheatre is often found. Verulamium has a theatre and Cirencester, Chester and Caerleon have amphitheatres, the latter two being substantial in size and possibly also used as military parade grounds or training areas, assault courses et cetera.

So why none in London so far? A prediction is clearly rather rash, but if any sporting or recreational establishment were to be discovered I would expect to find it West of Walbrook and South of the Fort and that it would have been built in the first place in the earlier years when the Army was the dominant influence. However, I cannot see us digging up St. Pauls in case that is where it is!

In the light of what has been said in this paper may I suggest that archaeologists not only in London but throughout Britain, and indeed anywhere in the Roman Empire, treat the parallels with India and indeed the rest of the British Empire as at least suggestive evidence in their researches and interpretations.