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WARRIOR DEITY FROM HADRIAN'S WALL: POSSIBLE REPRESENTATIONS OF COCIDIUS IN ROCK ART OF NORTHERN ENGLAND

ABSTRACT. Namirski Cezary. *Warrior Deity from Hadrian's Wall: Possible Representations of Cocidius in Rock Art of Northern England*

The article aims to analyse the phenomenon of uninscribed rock carvings in Northern England depicting warrior figures. The carvings, found as rock art in the landscape, as well as in other contexts, are likely of Romano-British origin. A possible link to the cult of Cocidius, a native Celtic deity worshipped mainly by soldiers of the Roman army (especially the auxiliaries) on Hadrian's Wall and in the surrounding areas, is explored. Various forms of evidence are considered, including epigraphic dedications to Cocidius, depictions on silver tablets from Bewcastle Roman Fort, the distribution of rock carvings, and the characteristics of military religion in Roman Britain.

Keywords: Britain; Celtic; Hadrian's Wall; rock art; Roman; Romano-British; warrior figures

Few areas of Britain have a more significant density of rock art than Northern England. The vast majority comprise Neolithic and Early Bronze Age carvings, primarily cup-marks and cup-and-ring marks present on outcrops, earthfast boulders, prehistoric monuments (e.g. standing stones, stone circles, cairns) and portable stones¹. Also to be found, however, are much later examples of rock motifs in the landscape, including warrior figures sometimes interpreted as depictions of Cocidius, a native deity often associated with Roman gods such as Mars and Silvanus. Worship of Cocidius emerged mainly in the areas near Hadrian's Wall (Fig. 1), and lasted perhaps from the 2nd to at least the 4th century AD². Together with the cult of other local deities, in some cases not known in other parts of the island, it reflects the personal character (often expressed through individual devotions) and regional variety of religion in Roman Britain³.

¹ Beckensall 2001, 12–13.

² Charlton and Mitcheson 1983, 153.

³ Salway 1997, 502.

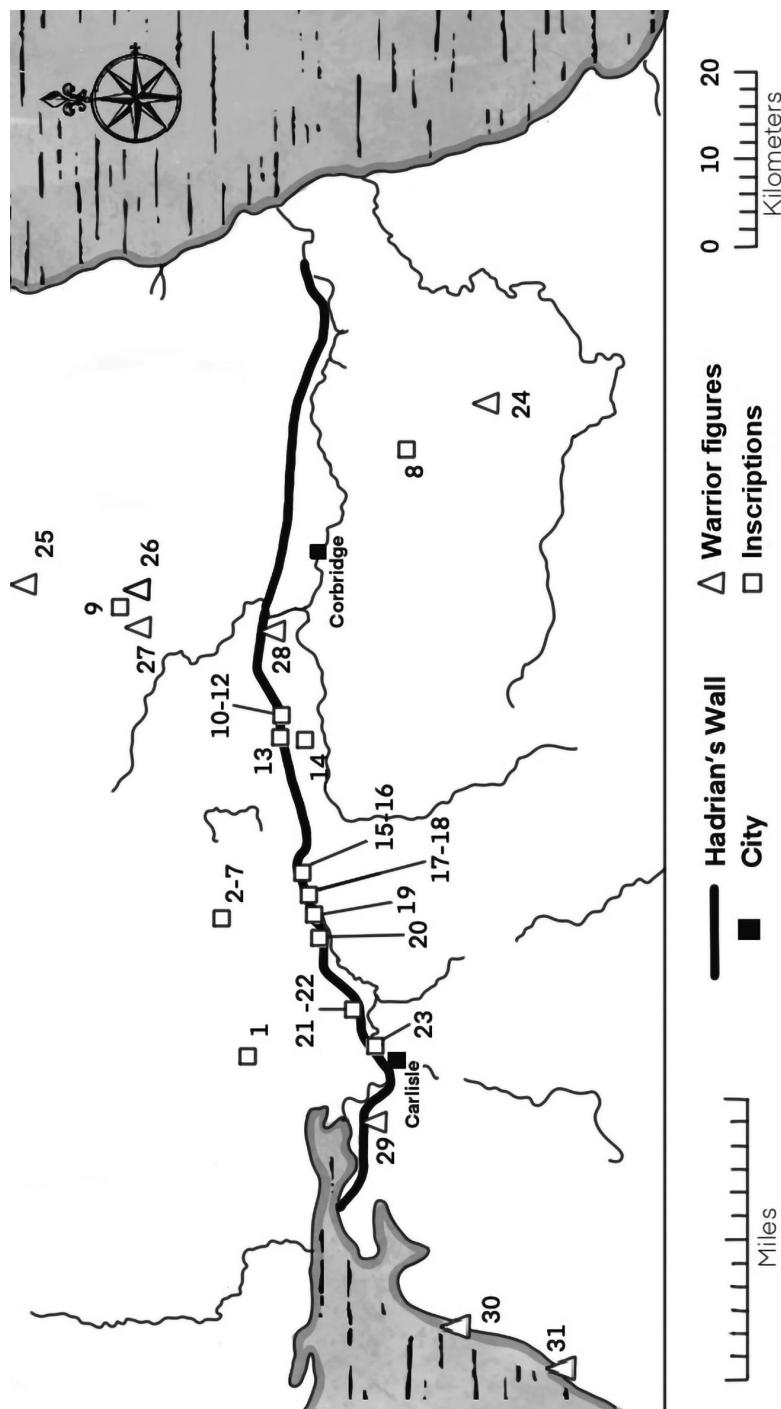


Fig. 1. Distribution of dedications to Cocidius and carvings with warrior figures near Hadrian's Wall. Dedications: 1 – RIB 966; 2–7 – RIB 985, RIB 986, RIB 987, RIB 988, RIB 989, RIB 993; 8 – RIB 1102; 9 – RIB 1207; 10–12 – RIB 1577, 1578, 1583; 13 – RIB 1633; 14 – RIB 1683; 15–16 – RIB 1872, 1885; 17–18 – RIB 1955, RIB 1956; 19 – RIB 1961; 20 – RIB 1963; 21–22 – RIB 2015, RIB 2020; 23 – RIB 2024; Warrior figures: 24 – Hollinside Farm, 25 – Yardhope, 26 – The Heads, 27 – “Robin of Risingham”, 28 – Carr Hill, 29 – Burgh-by-Sands, 30 – Beckfoot, 31 – Maryport. Map designed by Anna Pietraszkiewicz.

This article aims to analyse the phenomenon of warrior figures in Northern English rock art, including their chronology, iconography and context, in an attempt to draw conclusions regarding whether or not they can be considered part of a single and perhaps a wider tradition in artistic and chronological terms, as well as to examine their possible link to the worship of Cocidius. The opening part of the paper will present the corpus of carvings with uninscribed warrior figures in Northern England. In the subsequent sections, I will discuss the cult of Cocidius and its possible connection to the figures. In the closing section, I will present conclusions and consider their implications for the study of rock art in Northern England and military religion on Hadrian's Wall.

WARRIOR FIGURES IN ROCK ART OF NORTHERN ENGLAND

A brief attempt to provide an overview of the phenomenon of warrior figures in the landscape of Northern England was made by D. Beryl Charlton and Margaret M. Mitcheson. These scholars mentioned six sites with uninscribed warrior figures⁴, located in different contexts (not all are rock carvings) and made with the use of different techniques. Since their study, several new carvings have been discovered, both increasing the number of known figures and expanding the area of their distribution (Table 1).

The best-known example of an uninscribed carved warrior figure from Northern England is located in Yardhope (Fig. 2), within the military Otterburn Training Area in central Northumberland. The site lies north of Hadrian's Wall, some 1.5 km east of a Roman marching camp and 10 km north-east of the High Rochester (Bremenium) Roman fort. It is fairly difficult to access, since the figure has been carved into an outcrop located on a sandstone ridge that overlooks the valley of Holystone Burn and offers views towards Simonside Hills⁵. A shallow niche carved in sandstone contains a relief depicting a warrior. With arms outstretched, he holds a round shield in one hand and a spear in the other. The warrior appears to be naked, as the figure is rather slim and no element of clothing can be discerned. Of particular interest is the immediate context of the Yardhope relief – an outcrop with carving flanks an entrance to a roughly rectangular space (mostly natural, with some manmade modifications) enclosed by further outcrops (Fig. 3). Archaeological excavations of the area revealed evidence indicating the presence of a probable shrine. In the south-east corner of the natural chamber there was a hearth with substantial amount of carbon as well as a chimney-like structure made of stones and boulders⁶. On an outcrop

⁴Charlton and Mitcheson 1983, 150–151.

⁵Charlton and Mitcheson 1983, 143.

⁶Charlton and Mitcheson 1983, 145.

Table 1. Uninscribed warrior figures in rock art of Northern England.

Site (county)	Context	Technique	Figure
Adel Woods (Yorkshire West)	natural outcrop	incised/pecked	warrior holding round shield and spear
Beckfoot (Cumbria)	stone altar	relief	horned figure with weapon(?) and cuirass
Carr Hill (Northumberland)	natural outcrop near prehistoric carvings	incised/pecked	warrior with outstretched arms holding shield and spear(?)
Hollinside Farm (County Durham)	stone reused in farm building	relief	figure with outstretched arms holding weapon and animal head(?)
Maryport (Cumbria)	portable stone from Roman fort	relief with incised elements	horned figure with rectangular shield and spear
Maryport (Cumbria)	portable stone from Roman fort	incised	simple figure with round shield and spear
‘Robin of Risingham’ (Northumberland)	natural outcrop	relief	figure with bow, quiver of arrows and dead animal(?)
The Heads (Northumberland)	stone reused in farm building	relief	figure holding a spear
Yardhope (Northumberland)	natural rock outcrop next to a rock shrine	relief	warrior with outstretched arms holding round shield and spear

constituting the northern side of the chamber there is a ledge and a groove, likely used to support some sort of roofing, while in the western part of the chamber there is a rock-cut bench. As Charlton and Mitcheson pointed out, it is unlikely that the site was a mere temporary shelter: the amount of effort put into its remodelling and the presence of the warrior figure near its entrance allow it to be identified as a probable shrine⁷.

A relatively recent discovery, recorded during the Northumberland and Durham Rock Art Project (NADRAP), which was completed in 2008 and conducted mostly by volunteers⁸, is the warrior figure from Carr Hill (southern part of Northumberland, Fig. 4). It is located on a rocky knoll near the southern footing of the hill, between Carr Edge to the north and Frankham Fell to the south. Like the Yardhope carving, the Carr Hill warrior is depicted with outstretched arms; he carries a shield (somewhat sub-rectangular in shape) in one hand and what appears to be a raised spear in the other. Unlike the Yardhope figure, however, this carving is not a relief: it consists of grooves in a sandstone surface (it is unclear whether they were pecked or incised). In 2018, the surrounding

⁷Charlton and Mitcheson 1983, 146.

⁸Oswald and Ainsworth 2010, 37.



Fig. 2. Relief depicting a warrior or deity, possibly Cocidius, at Yardhope (Northumberland).
Photo by C. Namirski.

knoll was further deturfed by volunteers from the Tynedale North of the Wall Archaeology Group (including the author of this article), revealing at least one additional ambiguous figure close to the warrior as well as several artificial grooves beneath the turf below the warrior on the same rock sheet. Interestingly, a few metres west of the warrior figure there is a major concentration of at least 14 prehistoric carved rocks recorded mostly by Stan Beckensall; the main one is Carr Hill A, decorated with two well-preserved cup-and-ring marks⁹ (Fig. 5). This rock art may be associated with the spring that lies nearby to the south (the association of prehistoric carvings with water sources is well-established in Britain¹⁰). Therefore, the warrior figure was made in a site that had seen symbolic or ritual activity since prehistoric times and was clearly an important place for the local population. Evidence for Romano-British reuse has been recorded at numerous prehistoric ritual sites (including Neolithic chambered tombs and non-chambered long mounds, as well as Bronze Age round barrows¹¹), and Carr

⁹ Beckensall 2001, 122.

¹⁰ Laurie 2004, 95.

¹¹ Hutton 2011, 11–12.



Fig. 3. Rock shrine located next to the Yardhope warrior figure with ledge and groove (a probable support for roofing) visible to the right. Photo by C. Namirski.

Hill may be one of them. Considering this, one can speculate that the choice of location in which the warrior figure was made was not random, but perhaps influenced by pre-existing traditions regarding this place.

One of the most recently discovered carvings depicting a warrior figure is located in Adel Woods near Leeds (Yorkshire West), constituting one of the southernmost examples of rock art of this kind. The figure – a warrior holding a round shield and raised spear – was carved into the steeply sloping sandstone surface of a natural rock outcrop. It is tempting to link this carving to the nearby Adel Roman fort and settlement, identified by P. Wilson as the likely site of Cambodunum (Camboduno), mentioned in the “Antonine Itinerary” as being located 20 Roman miles of Calcaria (modern-day Tadcaster)¹².

A carving that somewhat departs from the characteristics of the rock art discussed above is the figure known as “Robin of Risingham” or “Rob of Risingham”, located south-east of West Woodburn (Northumberland), 1 km south-east of Risingham (Habitancum) Roman Fort. The relief made on a natural outcrop was recorded in the 18th century by J. Horsley and partially destroyed in 1819 by the landowner – only the legs and lower part of the torso have survived. In

¹² Wilson 2016, 283–284; *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti et Hierosolymitanum*, 223.



Fig. 4. Carving of a warrior figure at Carr Hill (Northumberland). Photo by C. Namirski.

1983, a replica based on historic documentation was erected close to remains of the original carving (Fig. 6). The surviving drawings reveal the male figure to be holding either a club or a dead animal (perhaps a rabbit or hare) in his left hand, sporting a quiver of arrows on his back, grasping a bow in his right hand, and wearing a tunic¹³. Thus, compared to the figures previously discussed, this carving featured greater detail and different weaponry. Nonetheless, the figure may possibly be associated with Cocidius, which can be inferred from its similarity to a depiction on the 2nd-century intaglio gem found in South Shields¹⁴.

The original context is lost in the case of a relief embedded in the wall of a building in The Heads farm, located some 3 km east of Risingham (Habitancum) Roman Fort, not far from “Robin of Risingham”. The figure holds a spear in right hand and is dressed in a tunic with belt¹⁵. The left hand did not survive, but it was likely raised as the right one is, which reflects the pattern of a warrior with outstretched arms holding weapons. Another similar relief is built into the wall of a barn at Hollinside Farm (County Durham) – in this case, the figure with outstretched arms appears to be holding an animal head.

¹³ Charlton and Mitcheson 1983, 151.

¹⁴ Idziak 2009: 67.

¹⁵ Charlton and Mitcheson 1983, 151 and plate XV.



Fig. 5. Prehistoric cup-and-ring marks near the warrior figure at Carr Hill (Northumberland).
Photo by C. Namirski.

Charlton and Mitcheson also mention uninscribed warrior figures that fall outside the scope of rock art in the landscape. These include figures from Maryport, Beckfoot, Chesters, Burgh-by-Sands and Newcastle-upon-Tyne¹⁶. Among the four figures discovered in Maryport Roman Fort, a relief depiction of a horned warrior on a 34 x 30 cm (13.5 x 12 inches) stone is of particular interest. Much like the figures found in the landscape, the horned warrior has outstretched arms carrying a spear and a shield, in this case, a clearly rectangular

¹⁶ Charlton and Mitcheson 1983, 148.



Fig. 6. Replica of the “Robin of Risingham” carving placed in 1983 next to remains of the original. Photo by Andrew Curtis.

one with a shield boss¹⁷. Like the Yardhope figure, the warrior is naked, but with the additional detail of a phallus. Such a figure cannot be a Roman soldier – M. Aldhouse-Green has suggested that it might depict either a deity from a non-classical pantheon or a satirical image of a barbarian¹⁸. Also from the Maryport Roman fort comes a warrior figure with outstretched arms (it survived only partially – the lower part of the stone is broken off). Unlike the horned warrior, this depiction is incised. The warrior carries a round shield in his right hand and a spear in his left hand¹⁹. He bears a particular resemblance to the Carr Hill warrior figure, both in iconography and technique of execution; although this is not sufficient to definitively identify the warrior figure as the depiction of a specific deity, it strongly suggest that it belongs to the same artistic tradition as the representations in rock art discussed.

¹⁷ Bailey 1915, 155 and plate VI.

¹⁸ Aldhouse-Green 2004, 38.

¹⁹ Bailey 1915, 155 and plate VI.

COCIDIUS AND HIS WORSHIP NEAR HADRIAN'S WALL

One interpretation applied to some of the warrior figures discussed above identifies them as depictions of Cocidius, the native Celtic deity known solely from Britain and mainly from epigraphic evidence. Cocidius is one of several gods of Celtic origin worshipped on Hadrian's Wall and its environs. Other examples of such deities are Belatucadrus (variously spelled, represented by no fewer than 19 epigraphic examples²⁰), Veteris, Mogons and Antenociticus²¹, whereas Arecurius, another god of likely Celtic origin, is known solely from the sculpture found in Corbridge Roman town (south of Hadrian's Wall, Northumberland)²². The evidence appears to indicate that in terms of personal devotions, those deities overshadowed the Roman gods in the area near Hadrian's Wall²³. Twenty-five inscriptions with dedications to Cocidius (Table 2) and a few possible but uncertain ones are known from Roman Britain, with the vast majority coming from Northern England. This epigraphic material confirms that Cocidius was worshipped mainly by soldiers of the Roman army, including officers: examples of this include an altar from Vindolanda dedicated to Cocidius by the prefect of the Second Cohort of Nervians (RIB 1683²⁴). Two altars dedicated to Cocidius (RIB 1961 and 1963), one of them by soldiers of *Legio VI Victrix*, were found to the east of milecastle 55 of Hadrian's Wall²⁵. Two further sandstone altars were found in milecastle 52 of Hadrian's Wall, one of which was dedicated by soldiers of the *Legio II Augusta* (RIB 1955), the other by soldiers of the *Legio XX Valeria Victrix* (RIB 1956). A broken altar dedicated to Cocidius by the soldier Vabrius was found at the foot of a crag east of milecastle 37²⁶. Cocidius was also worshipped by auxiliary soldiers of non-British origin, as attested by an altar from Birdoswald Roman Fort (Cumbria) on Hadrian's Wall dedicated to the deity by soldiers of the First Aelian Cohort of the Dacians. The aforementioned evidence for the cult of Cocidius among high-ranking officers prompted D.J. Breeze and B. Dobson to suggest that this deity was associated with higher social rank than Belatucadrus, who was apparently worshipped by people from lower social strata²⁷ (although one needs to bear in mind that this argument is based primarily on epigraphic evidence, which does not necessarily represent the entirety of social context in which both deities were worshipped).

²⁰ Webster 1995, 154.

²¹ Irby-Massie 1999, 104.

²² Hodgson 2015, 33.

²³ Breeze and Dobson 2000, 281.

²⁴ The acronym RIB is used in literature for "Roman Inscriptions of Britain" database, which can be found at <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/> (access February 2025).

²⁵ Breeze 2003, 150.

²⁶ Clayton 1855, 273.

²⁷ Breeze and Dobson 2000, 282.

Table 2. 25 inscriptions from Roman Britain mentioning Cocidius. Unless stated otherwise, all are on stone altars. Based on romaninscriptionsofbritain.org (access February 2025).

Number	Findspot	Content of inscription	Chronology
RIB 602	Lancaster (Lancashire), near Lancaster Castle	dedication to Mars Cocidius by Vibenius Lucius	unknown
RIB 966	Netherby Roman Fort (Cumbria)	dedication to Cocidius by Paternius Maternus, tribune of the First Cohort Nervana	unknown
RIB 985	400 m south of Bewcastle Roman Fort (Cumbria)	dedication to Cocidius by legionary centurion Annius Victor	unknown
RIB 986	Headquarters building of Bewcastle Fort (Cumbria)	name of Cocidius inscribed in capital letters on a silver plaque	3rd century AD
RIB 987	Headquarters building of Bewcastle Fort (Cumbria)	inscription “To the god: to the god Cocidius Aventinus set this up” (likely with secondary correction) on a silver plaque	3rd century AD
RIB 988	bed of Kirk Beck stream near Bewcastle (Cumbria)	dedication to Cocidius by Aurunceius Felicessemus	3rd century AD
RIB 989	foundations of Bewcastle Church (Cumbria)	dedication to Cocidius by tribune Quintus Peltrasius Maximus	3rd/early 4th century AD
RIB 993	Bewcastle (Cumbria)	dedication to Mars Cocidius by Aelius Vitalianus	unknown
RIB 1017	unspecified findspot in Cumbria	dedication to Jupiter, Riocalatis, Toutatis and Mars Cocidius by Vitalis	unknown
RIB 1102	400 m south-west of Ebchester Roman Fort (County Durham)	dedication to Vernostonus Cocidius by Virilis	unknown
RIB 1207	Risingham (Northumberland)	dedication to Cocidius and Silvanus	2nd/3rd century AD
RIB 1577	east of Mithraeum near Housesteads Roman Fort (Northumberland)	dedication to Cocidius and Genius of the garrison by soldier Valerius of the Sixth Legion	unknown
RIB 1578	south-west corner of Housesteads Fort (Northumberland)	dedication to Silvanus Cocidius by Quintus Florius Maternus, prefect of the First Cohort of Tungrians	unknown
RIB 1583	mithraeum near Housesteads Fort (Northumberland)	dedication to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Cocidius and Genius Loci	unknown
RIB 1633	foot of the rocky crag below milecastle 37 of Hadrian's Wall (Northumberland)	dedication to Cocidius by Vabrius	unknown
RIB 1683	Hardriding, south-west of Vindolanda Fort (Northumberland)	dedication to Cocidius by Decimus Caerellius Victor, prefect of the Second Cohort of Nervians	early 3rd century AD

RIB 1872	Birdoswald Roman Fort	dedication to Cocidius by First Aelian Cohort of Dacians	unknown
RIB 1885	farm building near Birdoswald Roman Fort	dedication to Cocidius and Jupiter Optimus Maximus by First Aelian Cohort of Dacians	270–273 AD
RIB 1955	milecastle 52 (Bankshead) of Hadrian's Wall (Cumbria)	dedication to Cocidius by soldiers of the Second Legion Augusta	unknown
RIB 1956	milecastle 52 (Bankshead) of Hadrian's Wall (Cumbria)	dedication to Cocidius by soldiers of the Twentieth Legion Valeria Victrix	262–266 AD
RIB 1961	east of milecastle 55 of Hadrian's Wall (Cumbria)	dedication to Cocidius by soldiers of Sixth Legion Victrix	unknown
RIB 1963	east of milecastle 55 of Hadrian's Wall (Cumbria)	dedication to Cocidius	unknown
RIB 2015	west of milecastle 59 of Hadrian's Wall (Cumbria)	dedication to Mars Cocidius by Martius, centurion of the First Cohort of Batavians	unknown
RIB 2020	near milecastle 60 of Hadrian's Wall (Cumbria)	dedication to Cocidius by soldiers of Sixth Legion Victrix	unknown
RIB 2024	near milecastle 65 of Hadrian's Wall (Cumbria)	dedication to Mars Cocidius by soldiers of the Second Legion Augusta	unknown

The popularity of Cocidius among the soldiers of Roman *auxilia* is attested by the fact that the seven recorded auxiliary dedications to him constitute 23% of all currently known dedications to Celtic deities found on Hadrian's Wall²⁸. It is also noteworthy that altars dedicated to Cocidius constitute the majority of altars discovered in milecastles on the Wall²⁹. L. Brenner argues that a widespread distribution of dedications to Cocidius along Hadrian's Wall and the nearby areas indicates that the deity was worshipped not just by a specific group of *auxilia* soldiers, but rather that dedication to and identification with Cocidius was widespread in the Roman army in modern-day Northern England³⁰. Of the aforementioned 25 inscriptions naming Cocidius, only two can be considered non-military in origin³¹. The altars dedicated to Cocidius are more common in or near the milecastles in the western part of Hadrian's Wall. Symonds argues convincingly that if this pattern is more or less representative of the original distribution of the dedications, it may reflect a more significant inclination to worship Cocidius as a protective warrior deity in the areas where soldiers were at greater personal risk³².

²⁸ Brenner 2024, 35.

²⁹ Symonds 2018, 79–80.

³⁰ Brenner 2024, 38.

³¹ Mann and Vanderspoel 2003, 401.

³² Symonds 2018, 80.

One of the most important pieces of evidence related to the worship of Cocidius comes from the Bewcastle Roman fort (Cumbria) located 9 km north of Hadrian's Wall. Underneath the 4th-century floor, in the 3rd-century destruction deposit inside the cellar of the *sacellum*³³, two silver plaques with depictions of Cocidius were found. The larger one (RIB 986) is of particular importance: the name of the deity is inscribed in capital letters, leaving no doubt regarding its identification. The figure holds a spear in its right hand and a sub-rectangular shield in its left hand (Fig. 7). A smaller plaque (RIB 987) depicts a warrior figure holding a spear. Both plaques have ribbed archways, which, as L. Keppie points out, bear a similarity to that from a relief recorded in 1825 (later lost) in Auchendavy Roman Fort (East Dunbartonshire) on Antonine's Wall, depicting an unidentified deity with a dagger³⁴. The plaques are not the only artefacts attesting to worship of Cocidius in Bewcastle: four altars dedicated to the deity were discovered nearby: a sandstone altar (RIB 985) was found some 400 m south of the fort, a second one was found in the Kirk Beck streambed near Bewcastle (RIB 988), the third altar, dedicated by tribune Quintus Peltrasius Maximus, was found built into the foundations of the church at Bewcastle (RIB 989), while the fourth one, dedicated to Mars Cocidius, was discovered in an unspecified findspot in or near the fort in 1812 (RIB 993). This cluster of finds allowed historians to identify Bewcastle as the likely site of Fanocodi (Fanum Cocidi), a sanctuary to Cocidius listed in "The Ravenna Cosmography"³⁵. The possibility that another shrine to Cocidius might have existed near the Vindolanda fort was suggested by Roger S.O. Tomlin on the basis of an altar discovered nearby (RIB 1683)³⁶. The only dedication to Cocidius discovered away from Hadrian's Wall comes from Lancaster (Lancashire) – a sandstone altar (RIB 602) dedicated to Mars Cocidius found in 1797 near Lancaster Castle.

Cocidius became subject to *interpretatio Romana* or perhaps constituted part of what D.M. Goldberg calls vernacular religion – a syncretic set of beliefs and religious practices emerging in localised contexts, in some cases without a clear-cut distinction between Roman and native elements³⁷. As argued by J. Webster, identifying Celtic gods with classical deities may in some cases be interpreted as 'resistant adaptation', in which a Roman deity is submitted to the power of a local one³⁸. In any case, on several altars from the eastern part of Hadrian's Wall, Cocidius is identified with Silvanus (an example being a sandstone altar from the south-west corner of Housesteads Fort, RIB 1578, which was

³³ Richmond, Hodgson and St. Joseph 1938, 208.

³⁴ Keppie 2018, 110–111.

³⁵ Frere 2001, 287.

³⁶ Tomlin 2012, 210.

³⁷ Goldberg 2009, 198.

³⁸ Webster 1997, 327.



Fig. 7. Inscribed silver plaque with a depiction of Cocidius found in Bewcastle Roman Fort (Cumbria). Drawn by R.P.W. (1952), source: romaninscriptionsofbritain.org, courtesy of Oxford University's CSAD.

dedicated to Silvanus Cocidius by a prefect of the cohort of Tungrians³⁹), while the inscriptions from the western part of the Hadrian's Wall tend to identify him with Mars (red sandstone altar dedicated to Mars Cocidius by the soldiers

³⁹ Anwyl 1906, 48.

of the *Legio II Augusta* was found near milecastle 65, RIB 2024). G.L. Irby-Massie suggests that this geographic pattern may reflect the different character of worshipping Cocidius: he might have been worshipped as a god of hunting in the east (this is also indicated by the 2nd-century AD Roman intaglio gem with a figure of a hunter holding a rabbit found in South Shields, interpreted as a depiction of Silvanus Cocidius⁴⁰), whereas in the western part of Hadrian's Wall, he was a warrior deity⁴¹. Interestingly, there is a single inscription in which Cocidius is identified with another non-Roman god of likely Celtic or Germanic origin: a sandstone altar dedicated to Vernostonus Cocidius (RIB 1102) was found in 1784, south-west of Ebchester Roman Fort (County Durham). It was dedicated by certain Virilis, perhaps a Germanic auxiliary soldier. In Brenner's view, such an example of syncretism within the native Celtic pantheon emphasises the association of Cocidius with the auxiliaries⁴². P. Salway argues that Vernostonus Cocidius was either a local version of the deity, or a conflation of Cocidius with one of the Germanic gods on the part of Virilis⁴³. This inscription constitutes an example demonstrating that in the religious practices of Roman Britain sometimes there is no clear-cut distinction between the foreign and the native aspect, validating the aforementioned concept of "vernacular religion" as understood by D.M. Goldberg⁴⁴.

The only primary written source indirectly concerning the cult of Cocidius is the aforementioned reference to Fanocodi (Fanococidi, Fanum Cocidi) in "The Ravenna Cosmography"⁴⁵, identified as Bewcastle Fort, where Cocidius was worshipped. Despite this paucity of written evidence, one may speculate that the cult of Cocidius developed in what is today Northern England before the construction of Hadrian's Wall. In the case of Maponus, another Celtic deity worshipped in this part of Britain, the placename Lochmaben in south-western Scotland may correspond to Locus Maponi mentioned in "The Ravenna Cosmography", which is interpreted as possible evidence that a native sanctuary dedicated to the deity existed before the arrival of the Roman army⁴⁶. Examples of native ritual sites adapted for Roman cults are known from other parts of Britain, for example, Roman baths and a temple of Minerva were built on the site of the sacred spring of Sulis in Bath (Somerset)⁴⁷, starting in the 1st century AD.

⁴⁰ Richmond and McIntyre 1937, 109; Idziak 2009, 66–67.

⁴¹ Irby-Massie 1999, 111.

⁴² Brenner 2024, 36.

⁴³ Salway 1997, 503.

⁴⁴ Goldberg 2009, 198.

⁴⁵ *Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia* V, 433.

⁴⁶ Salway 1997, 503.

⁴⁷ Haskett 2009, 78.

CARVED WARRIOR FIGURES AND COCIDIUS: A LINK?

Some of the carved warrior figures from Northern England discussed here have traditionally been associated with Cocidius. However, such a connection can never be certain because they are uninscribed, although in many cases that interpretation appears likely for two main reasons. First, the iconography of the warrior figures in rock art bears a close resemblance to the aforementioned depictions of Cocidius on silver plaques from Bewcastle Fort. The most striking common feature is the highly schematic position with outstretched arms holding a spear in one hand and a shield in the other. The departure of some carvings from that pattern does not necessarily negate their direct or indirect association with Cocidius; in the case of “Robin of Risingham”, due to the relief’s clear hunting connotations (bow, arrows, dead animal), I.A. Richmond and J. McIntyre interpret it as a depiction of Silvanus⁴⁸, a god with whom Cocidius was identified. Thus, associations between some warrior figures and Cocidius may be inferred from their similarity to the depictions on the Bewcastle plaques, while in other cases the identification of Cocidius with Roman deities may possibly explain the iconography of particular carvings.

The second main argument in favour of identifying at least some of the discussed carved warrior figures as depictions of Cocidius is the fact that their distribution overlaps with the distribution of inscriptions mentioning Cocidius, mostly dedications on altars found in the area both near and directly on Hadrian’s Wall. The carvings are present near the main clusters of dedications to Cocidius (central and western parts of Hadrian’s Wall), as well as near the isolated altars dedicated to the deity (“Robin of Risingham” and The Head figures are located close to the findspot of the altar dedicated to Cocidius and Silvanus from Risingham, RIB 1207). Charlton and Mitcheson point out that in the case of the Hollinside Farm carving, a dedication to Silvanus (a god often associated with Cocidius) was found in Lanchester (*Longovicium*) Roman Fort, located less than 1.5 km away⁴⁹ (RIB 1085), perhaps adding to plausibility of interpreting the figure as Cocidius or Silvanus Cocidius (although one must bear in mind that the original context and location of the figure is unknown⁵⁰). Admittedly, this argument cannot be applied to all of the carved warrior figures in question. For example, the location of the Adel Woods carving falls well outside of the area where the cult of Cocidius is

⁴⁸ Richmond and McIntyre 1937, 108.

⁴⁹ Charlton and Mitcheson 1983, 151.

⁵⁰ Some of the rock carvings found in secondary contexts in North-East England come from significant distance away – at Hollinside Farm (Tyne and Wear) there is a sandstone block with prehistoric carvings which turned out to have been brought from the site near Belsay (Northumberland), over 20 km to the North-West. Therefore, the possibility that the original location of the Hollinside Farm (County Durham) figure is relatively far away cannot be dismissed.

epigraphically attested; therefore an identification of that specific warrior figure as Cocidius is tentative at best.

The identification of carved warrior figures with Cocidius or other regional deity appears to be consistent with the main characteristics of religion in Roman Britain; this was a very personal aspect of life that cannot be easily captured solely in the patterns of organised and institutional worship, as individual devotions practised alongside official state worship played a significant role in it. Indeed, as P. Salway points out, a concise overview of religious life in Roman Britain is highly elusive due to this variability of personal religion⁵¹. The distribution of warrior carvings in the landscape – in most cases outside of major sanctuaries identified on Hadrian's Wall – is in harmony with that highly variable character of religious life in Roman Britain; they may indeed be associated with personal devotions that fell outside the scope of organized cult practices. The Yardhope site in Northumberland, where the warrior carving is located in a clearly ritual context, features a small rock shrine located among natural rocks some distance from military sites. It likewise points towards a less organized and more personalized, limited-scale character of worship associated with the warrior figure. Furthermore, the placement of rock carvings in the landscape is also consistent with devotion to Cocidius among auxiliary soldiers who worshipped deities of the Celtic pantheon, for natural landscape features were revered in ancient Celtic and Romano-British religious practices. Examples include cave sites from the Bristol Channel region, with Romano-British material interpreted by R. Hutton as evidence for small-scale ritual activity⁵², as well as the Celtic concept of nemeton, often a sacred grove or clearing in a forest, attested to by several placenames in Roman Britain⁵³. Possible use of carvings in the landscape as cult features not only reflects the significance of natural places in Celtic worship, but also indicates the blending of different approaches to religion, as pointed out by J. Webster, iconography in stone was a non-indigenous medium of worship⁵⁴, in this case used in a context heavily influenced by the Celtic practices.

CONCLUSIONS

Although they cannot be shown to be chronologically uniform, Northern England's carvings of uninscribed warrior figures share notable similarities, even though they were made with different techniques and are found in variety of

⁵¹ Salway 1997, 502.

⁵² Hutton 2011, 8.

⁵³ Salway 1997, 492–493.

⁵⁴ Webster 1997, 327.

contexts. The representations of warriors, often naked (Yardhope, Adel Woods, larger Maryport carving), with outstretched arms holding spear and shield (Yardhope, Carr Hill, Adel Woods, two Maryport carvings, possibly The Head) are documented not only on outcrops in the landscape (Yardhope, Carr Hill, Adel Woods) but also at Roman military sites (Maryport Roman fort) and in secondary contexts (The Head). In some cases, a dead animal takes the place of a shield ("Robin of Risingham", probably Hollinside Farm), evoking connotations of hunting rather than warfare. If these figures are indeed depictions of Cocidius, such diversity in attributes should not be surprising, for altar dedications identify Cocidius with both Mars (god of war) and Silvanus (god of forests and hunting).

The main arguments to support the identification of at least some of those carved warrior figures as Cocidius are as follows: (i) the similarity with the depiction of Cocidius on silver plaques from the Bewcastle Roman fort; (ii) the overlap with the distribution of dedications to Cocidius found on altars; (iii) the consistency of such interpretation with the overall highly individualized and variable character of personal religion on Hadrian's Wall (perhaps the placement of rock carvings in the landscape can be seen as yet another category of ritual practices associated with the presence of Roman army). These arguments aside, however, the carved warriors cannot be definitively identified as depictions of Cocidius, especially considering the fact that Celtic deities' spheres of influence were less specialised than those of Roman gods; therefore, military equipment may be present in depictions of deities other than Cocidius.

An even more difficult question is that of chronology. Rarely can rock art in the landscape be dated with precision, and the carvings' iconographic details (weapons, in some cases clothing) appear insufficiently diagnostic to securely link them to a specific chronological timeframe. Considering the relative longevity of the cult of Cocidius in the area of Hadrian's Wall (lasting at least from the 2nd to 4th centuries AD, and possibly predating the arrival of Roman army), it is possible that differences in iconography and technique of execution visible among certain carvings reflect chronological changes in the manner of depicting warriors. However, for now this point remains mere speculation that can be supported only by future discoveries of carved warrior figures in more precisely dateable contexts. Currently, it is impossible to assign the carvings discussed here to a single chronological horizon, not least because the association of specific figures with Cocidius remains uncertain.

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