BRITANNIA ROMANA

Ebudes

Gulf of Edinburgh

vallum
aelium

vallum antonini

The Roman Limits in Britannia

An analogy might be drawn between the geographical limits of the imperialist state and the lifespan of a pathogen. In both cases there is, at first, a period of nascency and immediate local consolidation, followed by a period of rapid growth, consumption, and geographical expansion, a period of eventual ossification and delimitation, and then, finally, a period of withdrawal and collapse. Imperialism, we might imagine, is a virus; and one which subsists by devouring cultures, resources, and land. In the modern era, imperialism presents itself as the highest stage of capitalism—a period in which the interests of finance capital dominate the geopolitical interests of the state. On this, Lenin wrote that:

> Imperialism is capitalism at the stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.[1]

Yet imperialism is not simply the annexation of land, resource, and labor. Lenin warned us against clinging to this over-simplistic understanding of the phenomenon by noting that while imperialism indeed entails annexation, violence, and reaction,[2] the most important characteristic feature of the phenomenon itself is the question of finance capital—that is, the question of retained earnings and monies generated by *investment* from the capital of the financial (and thus social) élite. Simply put, the defining feature of imperialism is the wielding of state power in the service of *finance* capital for the accumulation of *real* capital.

The geographical borders of the imperial state must, by extension, represent this impetus; they must exist in service of this logic—to control the flow of material goods, resources, and people for the purposes of finance capital. In the modern era, national imperial borders, such as those of the United States, function as consummate and sophisticated manifestations of this logic. In the ancient world, while the technologies of border control were more simplistic, the logic of the imperial border itself remained the same. If an ancient state is said to be imperial, its border must then reflect the economic motivations of imperialism. That is, the border must be a signifier of economic control, of violence and reaction, and exist in ser-

By Ben Stahnke

"The study of border walls as representations of waning imperial state sovereignties is particularly important in the modern

The Border Walls of Empire

vice of finance capital for the purpose of generating real capital for the imperial state's social and ruling élite. A political ecology of the imperial border, if it is to remain both historically sound and centered upon the real-world circulation of resources in the service of class society, must take into account not only the intersection of politics and environment more generally, but also the interplay of class, finance, and the social metabolism of the state itself.

In the north of England, near the present-day border of Scotland, the ruins of Hadrian's Wall persist along the Tyne-Solway firth—a reminder of imperial Rome's geographical limits on the isle. These ancient borderlands are home to the stony and earthen vestiges of an explicitly imperialist strategy of border management from a time long before ours; a once-fortified space of *occupied* land where the Roman state utilized a continuous, militarized wall to control the flow of goods and people across the limits of its northern-most jurisdictional region in Britannia. Often thought to act in a strictly defensive capacity, the wall—on close investigation—reveals itself as a tool of Roman economic control: an imperialistic device in service of capital.

In this paper, I work to construct an explicitly anti-imperial political ecology of the fortified Roman frontiers in Britannia as they relate, specifically, to the social metabolism of the imperial state—that is, I work to better understand the ways in which the Roman state controlled its metabolic circulation of capital, goods, and people in relationship to both geography and social class. And, further, I seek to understand what the construction of a fortified and militarized border wall *means* for the imperial state—that is, what the wall says about the past, the present, and the future of the state itself. To achieve this, I lean into the material dimensions of the environmental and political histories of Rome, as well as the ways in which the class society endemic to the Roman state manifested itself in imperial Roman border management. In short, I hope to uncover the ways in which the reactionary and violent Roman slavocracy, in service of Roman financial capital and class society, fed Rome's border management strategy in Britannia. My rationale for doing so is to better understand imperial border strategies more generally—especially where the implementation of border walls is concerned.

My argument in this paper will follow along the lines that imperial border walls do not arise amidst the ascendency, growth, and expansion periods of the empire; but that they emerge during a period of imperial ossification and delimitation—at the end of what I will call a *metabolic amalgamation*, where all the spheres of nature, production, society, and political heterogeneity are swept up into a great and imperial homogenization—a great and uniform dominion under

neoliberalized and globalized era, where national and local border walls are being constructed at an increasing rate."

The Pretense of Power

an imperial financial singularity—and that, by necessity, border walls not only foreshadow the eventual withdrawal, decline, and collapse of the empires in which they emerge, but that their use is also tied tightly to environmental and climatological change as well. In specific, border walls seem, by their own implication, to permanently problematize what we might imagine to be *unwinnable* imperial frontiers. As Wendy Brown observed:

> Rather than emanating from the sovereignty of the nation-state, then, [walls] signal the loss of nation-state sovereignty's *a priori* status and easy link with legal authority, unity, and settled jurisdiction. This condition is evident in the fact that the new walls codify the conflicts to which they respond as permanent and unwinnable.[3]

The study of border walls as representations of waning imperial state sovereignties is particularly important in the modern neoliberalized and globalized era, where national and local border walls are being constructed at an increasing rate.[4] In the last 220 years 62 unique border walls have been constructed, with 28 of those instances occurring since the year 2000 alone.[5] Yet, as Wendy Brown noted, "Walls are consummately functional, and walls are potent organizers of human psychic landscapes generative of cultural and political identities. [...] A wall as such has no intrinsic or persistent meaning or signification."[6]

Thus the *meaning* of fortified borders themselves must entail the features and characteristics of the societies in which they emerge. This is the ontological essence of a material conception of the border: matter itself is imbued with import by and through the social formations we inhabit.

"Borderlands," Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson observed, "are sites and symbols of power. Guard towers and barbed wire may be extreme examples of the markers of sovereignty which inscribe the territorial limits of state, but they are neither uncommon nor in danger of disappearing from the world scene."[7] Where the modes of resource extraction, production, distribution, and consumption of present-day empire find themselves in a world increasingly no longer able to sustain them, the upswing of border wall constructions at such an auspicious time in history have much to tell us about the future of modern day empire.

However, to speculate on—and better understand—the future, we must also look to the past.

ROMAN LIMITS AND IMPERIALISM

As a—if not *the*—precursor to the modern western imperial state, the Roman state has much to tell us regarding the western imperial conception of the border, the frontier, and the limit—as well as the border walls which often grow upon them.

Roman Limits and Imperialism

Historian David Shotter, in *The Roman Frontier in Britain* noted that:

> Like so many things in Rome, the concept of frontier (*limes*) had its origins in a long-distant agricultural past; a *limes* was a bank or path, usually of stone, which separated property from property and field from field. This clearly in its turn derived from a simpler bank formed by the turning of a furrow in a manner still kept ceremonially alive in the days of empire.[8]

The Roman conception of the limit—informed by this early agricultural peculiarity—was, by extension, one which arose from the unique agricultural metabolism of the Romans on the Italic peninsula; a concrete political representation of Rome's agricultural metabolism, later emblematized as the demarcated conceptions of the imperial state limit. As a society which had grown from the unification of scattered hill-top villages along the Tiber River in the early sixth century BCE,[9] the city of Rome itself emerged from the unification of these villages and from the resultant encircling of the nascent municipality by an earthen bank—"a precursor of the so-called Servian Walls."[10] Rome's early utilization of the limit fortification was threefold. It was used to:

1. demarcate Roman territory,

2. preserve territorial integrity, and

3. exercise military, political, and economic control over the traffic of the lower Tiber Valley.[11]

While the argument might be counterposed that the Roman conception of the limit is one which all civilizations and state-forms share, state borders and limits in fact reflect unique environmental geographies, minor and dominant modes of production, and the peculiar social and environmental histories endemic to the state itself. Where pre-Roman Britannia is concerned, for example, the native Briton notion of the limit was quite different. On this, Strabo, in the *Geographiká*, observed that, for the pre-Roman Britons:

> The forests are their cities; for they fence in a spacious circular enclosure with trees which they have felled, and in that enclosure make huts for themselves and also pen up their cattle—not, however, with the purpose of staying a long time.[12]

Imperialism
resource extraction~
EXPANSION expansion~
CONQUEST oppression~
subjugation~ division~
subjugation division
military territorial
military territorial

BRITANNIÆ ANTIQUÆ

Caesar Traianus Hadrianus

Imperialism and Finance Capital

Following Rome's political and economic expansion—first across the Italic peninsula, and later over the larger Mediterranean region—it was the *Roman* conception of the border, the limit, and the frontier which defined not only Rome's enforcement of its own jurisdictional sovereignty, but the local sovereignties of the states and peoples neighboring Rome.

The Roman state, both in the economic and the geopolitical sense, is an historical example of a rabid imperialism—that is, the Roman state existed metabolically by way of conquest, annexation, and a great gathering-up of all surrounding lands, resources, and peoples for the purposes of Roman finance capital: an existential phenomenon which seems to be shared by all imperial polities. On this, Lenin wrote that:

> If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of imperialism we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism. Such a definition would include what is most important, for, on the one hand, finance capital is the bank capital of a few very big monopolist banks, merged with the capital of the monopolist associations of industrialists; and, on the other hand, the division of the world is the transition from a colonial policy which has extended without hindrance to territories unseized by any capitalist power, to a colonial policy of monopolist possession of the territory of the world, which has been completely divided up.[13]

While we must be careful not to engage in a reductive historical analysis in which we conflate the imperialism of the Roman era to the imperialism of the modern era, similarities indeed abound where imperialism is the *de facto*—and driving—political theory *and* metabolic function of the state. A uniting theme for imperialism in *all* eras is the great gathering up of the varying methods and forces of production, rabid geographical expansion and conquest, and the unique relationship of capital to the state itself. Lenin wrote that imperialism—specifically in the capitalist era, but which may also be applied to the Roman era—must entail the following five points:

1. the singular concentration of production and capital, leading to a series of monopolizations which in turn impact the economic life of the state;

2. the coalescence of bank and industrial capital as *finance capital*, which in turn supports a powerful financial oligarchy;

"Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established."

3. the export of *capital*—as distinguished from the export of commodities—acquires, for the state, an exceptional importance;

4. "the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves,"[14] and

5. the rabid territorial division of the known world among competing powers

Lenin went on to note that, "Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed."[15] Interestingly, and for our purposes here, what we can extract from Lenin's analysis is the unique process in which the concentration of production and resources feeds the state's financial oligarchs, who then come to dominate the state's geopolitical processes of expansion and continued consumption. We need not conflate the imperialism of the modern capitalist era with the peculiarities of Roman capital to come to understand that imperialism itself emblematizes a specific formation of the social metabolism, driven by the greed and rabidity of the state's financial elite, and entailing a geopolitical—and thematic—movement of expansion, consolidation, conquest, amalgamation, and, ultimately, collapse.

ROMAN EXPANSION

"By the time Augustus came to power," the historian Stephen Dyson observed, "the Romans had been dealing with frontier problems in Italy and the west for nearly four hundred years."[16] These four hundred years saw the growth of the nascent Roman Republic from "a mosaic of cities organized into the provinces which made up the [eventual] Empire"[17] to a complex series of administrational jurisdictions, divided into interior and frontier provinces for—ultimately—the sake of Roman senatorial control. The first Roman provincial acquisition—Sicily (*Sicilia*)—came as a result of the First Punic War (264-41 BCE), and demonstrated two methods of direct Roman provincial control: "direct rule by a Roman magistrate, and indirect administration by using an existing king,"[18] where, at this stage in Roman history, Rome had demonstrated "little inclination to rule directly."[19] As Rome's political, social, and economic influence spread outward from the Italic peninsula and into the surrounding lands of the Mediterranean, and as new political and economic opportunities for exploitation began to open up in Spain, Macedonia, Asia Minor, Syria, Gaul, Africa, and the Balkans, Rome's reluctance for direct rule began to wane. The Roman reliance on native home-rule by kings—kings who often held the ceremonial title of *socius et amicus Romani populi*—also began to wane as the use of direct, Roman-appointed administration began to rise.[20]

Yet the borderlands were, for Rome, always an overdetermined phenomenon, driven by the exigencies and necessities of imperialism itself. The limit was not simply—in the case of early Republican, later Imperial—a line, an easily-defined space, or a demarcation reducible to a single quality. Rather, the Roman *limites* represented both ideological and material factors: factors which were determined directly by the individuals who enacted them —and also by those who contested them. The historian Hugh Elton noted that:

> In the Roman World there were a number of overlapping frontier zones. These frontier zones might be defined by four groups of people: Roman soldiers, Roman civilians, local natives, and barbarians. Each group had their own boundaries of different types: political, social, ethnic, religious, linguistic, economic and military. These could, but did not have to, coincide with those of other groups. It was this mixture of boundaries which together made the frontier.[21]

For Rome, the British frontier was one which emerged only after Rome's own immediate Mediterranean growth; a growth which quickly spread to western, and finally northwestern Europe. The attempt at British conquest, at a Roman Britain, was one which, for the Romans, reached toward that far, quasi-mythic, Thulean north: a region on the cusp of the known world, *qua ultima*

Thule—a land which was, as Pliny the Elder imagined, "The farthest of all [...] in which there be no nights at all, as we have declared, about mid-summer, namely when the Sun passes through the sign Cancer; and contrariwise no days in midwinter: and each of these times they suppose, do last six months, all day, or all night."

For the Romans, however, the British Isles—more so than the Orkneys, the Shetlands, and other less accessible spaces—were far from mythical and were, in fact, quite well-known. The Romans held surprisingly sophisticated geographical information about the world in which they dwelt, and the British Isles were no exception. Yet, for the Romans, an air of mystique still hung upon the British Isles and their peoples—upon the forest and hill-dwelling peoples whom the Romans knew as the *Brigantes*, the *Durotriges*, the *Catuvellauni*, the *Iceni*, the *Silures*, the *Atrebates*, the *Cantii*, the *Trinovantes*, the *Cornovii*, the *Parisi*, and the *Ordovices*.[22] North of the narrow British median, in modern day Scotland, the Romans knew only those tribes whom they collectively called the Caledonians.

In his *Natural History* (IV), Pliny the Elder noted that the region of what would later come to be known as Britannia, "was itself called Albion, while all the islands [...] are called the British Isles."[23] Pliny also went on to note that:

> The historian Timaeus says that six days' sail up-Channel from Britain is the island of Mictus (Wight) in which tin is produced. Here he says the Britons sail in boats of wickerwork covered in sewn leather. There are those who record other islands: the Scandiae, Dumna, the Bergi, and Bernice, the largest of them all, from which the crossing to Thyle (Thule) is made. One day's sail from Thyle is the frozen sea called by some the Cronian Sea.[24]

In the mid-first century BCE *Gallic War* (V), Julius Caesar (*Gaius Iulius Caesar*) wrote that the largest of the British Isles was:

> triangular in shape, with one side opposite Gaul. [...] The length of this side is about 500 miles. Another side faces Spain and the west. In this direction lies Hibernia (Ireland), half the size of Britain, so it is thought, and as dis-

tant from it as Britain is from Gaul. [...] in addition it is thought a number of smaller islands are close by, in which, according to some writers, there are thirty days of continuous darkness around midwinter. [...] Thus the whole [British] island is 2,000 miles in circumference.[25]

Thus was Britannia known to the Romans, to their cartographers and geographers, and to their historians, yet it was not until Caesar's 55-54 BCE military excursions onto the British Isles that Roman political and economic interest in—and its exploitation of—Britannia began in earnest.

THE ROMAN CONQUEST

Rome's involvement with the British Isles—Britannia specifically—spanned, following Caesar, a period of nearly five centuries.[26] Britannia, as the historian Adrian Goldsworthy noted:

> was a late addition to the Roman Empire, conquered at a time when expansion was becoming rare, but the actual conquest in AD 43 was not the first military contact between the empire and the Britons. Almost a century before, Julius Caesar, then proconsul (or governor) of Gaul, landed in the south-east [of Britain] in 55 BC and again in 54 BC. He beat down the fierce resistance of the local tribes and accepted their submission, but did not choose to stay over the winter and never returned.[27]

The historian David Breeze noted that, for the Romans, "Britain lay on the very edge of the Roman empire. It would have taken a traveller two to three months to journey from Rome to Hadrian's Wall."[28] Following the Octavian pacification during the Roman civil wars of the first century, and as Roman imperial administration began to move towards direct governorship—by either imperial or senatorial appointment—Octavian (*Gaius Octavius Thurinus*), the Emperor Augustus after 27 BCE, began a series of excursions and acquisitions to gain more territory in Europe along the Danube—acquisitions which led to the creation of new frontier provinces such as Illyricum, Pannonia, and Moesia.

Augustus, the historian Hugh Elton noted, "re-

"Not unlike the Americans, the Romans had a particular worldview: the gods had given them the right to rule the world."

Invasion, Occupation, and Withdrawal

garded the advance of the border with pride,"[29] and the rapid expansion of Rome's territorial control in Europe, along the imperial nature of Roman politics, were buried deeply not only in the political psyche of the Julio-Claudian dynasty—Rome's earliest imperial family—but in the political economic mode of Roman acquisition as well. "The Romans," commented historian David Breeze:

> had a particular worldview: the gods had given them the right to rule the world. The continual success of Roman arms demonstrated the validity of this assertion. As the empire would continue to expand, there was no need for frontiers. This was the situation in Britain during the decades after the conquest.[30]

It was this political *Weltanschauung*, along with the military, political, and economic logics endemic to imperialism, that led the emperor Claudius (*Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus*) to land an army on the shores of Britannia in 43 CE to "win [himself] a triumph"[31] and to secure such rich British resources as tin, lead, and lumber. Historian Peter Salway noted that, "When Emperor Claudius landed a Roman army on the [British] south coast in A.D. 43 a process was begun which was to transform the face of Britain and give a new direction to its history."[32]

Environmentally, Britain in the first century CE, as Rob Collins observed, could best be described as:

upland, with the low-lying areas of the east and west coastal plains separated by the broad spine of the low-lying Pennine mountains and Cheviot hills. The mountains, along with the passes, crags, dales, and valleys between them, were probably difficult to pacify, and the long-term occupation of forts throughout the Roman period across the north of England may suggest a situation in which the local population was never completely subjugated. Alternatively, the distribution may suggest a desire to control strategic points in the landscape for purposes of supply and communication, including natural resources such as lead. One does not preclude the other.[33]

The driving historical and political themes of the Roman excursions into Britannia were, as David Breeze observed in *Roman Scotland*, invasion, conquest, occupation, withdrawal, and external relations.[34] We might shorten this thematic analysis by noting that Rome's interest in Britain followed its own financial oligarchs' interests in the resources of Rome—a signifier of Roman imperialism itself.

Where the previous century's incursions of Julius Caesar had less to do "with a long-term strategy for Britain than with the security situation in Gaul and with Caesar's own political position in Rome itself,"[35] the invasion of the Claudian army was indeed meant to establish permanent occupation. While such an invasion might have been fore-

1. Internal devel
2. Social stratif
3. Wealth dispar
4. External int
5. Conquest
6. Division
7. Ossification

The **WALL** divides communities, fractures landscapes, creates choke-points of economic and migratory control, and signifies an end to imperial expansion

Roman Limits and Imperialism

shadowed by those in Rome's imperial circle of political élites during the reign of Octavian,[36] the British conquest in fact went against the firm advice of Octavian to his successor Tiberius (*Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti filius Augustus*), who exclaimed that the Empire "should be kept within its current boundaries."[37]

Historian Stephen Dyson noted that, "Rome was often drawn to a frontier because the local cultural and political dynamics affected their interests [and] [...] once the decision to intervene had been made, Roman success depended on a shrewd analysis of the nature of local conditions and of those forces that might favor Rome, as well as those that would oppose it."[38] And in the period between Tiberius' succession (14-37 CE) and the succession of his nephew Claudius in 41 CE, Roman foreign relations with the vague British frontier became increasingly strained due to a growing cross-Channel economy between Britain and Gaul which saw many of the southern British inhabitants seek to become "Romanized"—a move which became increasingly frictive for many northern British inhabitants—and a growing political hostility emblematized by the 40 CE death

of Cunobelinus ("strong dog"), a southern Briton king allied with Rome as *socius et amicus Romani populi*, or "king and friend of the Roman people." The ensuing power struggle between Cunobelinus' sons—Adminius, Caratacus, and Togodumnus—and their driving out of the chief Roman ally in Britain, King Verica of the Atrebates, all exacerbated what became an increasingly fractious political atmosphere. After the assassination of the emperor Caligula (*Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus*) in 41 CE, the new emperor, Claudius, "had to give Britain considerable thought."[39] Claudius, to reassert control of the Roman tributes on southern Britain, and to gain further control of land and resources in the north of Britain, organized an invasion force to reinstate the exiled King Verica of the Atrebates.

As David Shotter recorded, "The invasion force of 43 CE consisted of four legions—II *Augusta*, IX *Hispania*, XIV *Gemina Martia Victrix*, and XX *Valeria Victrix*, with detachments at least from others, including VIII *Augusta*."[40] Cunobelinus' old capital city at Camulodunum (modern-day Colchester) was quickly captured within the first warring season, and Claudius himself visited the

Imperialism and Finance Capital

city to revel in the triumphal entry. From Colchester, Roman invasions were launched northwards towards present-day Lincoln, north-westwards towards Wroxeter, westwards towards Gloucester, and south-westwards towards Exeter. On the Isle of Wight, the future emperor Vespasian (*Titus Flavius Vespasianus*) waged war against Cunobelinus' son Caratacus—a chief opponent of the Roman occupation until he was handed over in 51 CE by Queen Cartimunda of the Brigantes.[41] The Roman historian Cassius Dio recorded that the native Britons were unfortunately ill-prepared for the initial invasion:

> For the Britons as a result of their inquiries had not expected that they would come, and had therefore not assembled beforehand. And even when they did assemble, they would not come to close quarters with the Romans, but took refuge in the swamps and the forests, hoping to wear out the invaders in fruitless effort, so that, just as in the days of Julius Caesar, they should sail back with nothing accomplished.[42]

The ensuing century of occupation, however, was not to be a simple wash, and the Romans dug in for what was to be an occupation of continued—and oppressive—military and political maneuvering.

The historian Richard Hingley noted that during the British conquest, "A large Roman army crossed the Channel from Gaul and Lowland Britain was gradually subdued during the middle and late first century AD. This conquest occurred through the use of diplomacy and armed violence directed against some of the people of Britain."[43] During the middle and late first century CE, the Romans engaged in the logistics of military occupation by way of road-building, fort-building, and continued campaigns against the indigenous populations in efforts of subjugation and forced submission.

During the reign of the emperor Vespasian from 69 to 79 CE, the military exploits of Agricola (*Gnaeus Julius Agricola*)—a Gallo-Roman general who would, in 77 CE, be appointed as consul and governor of Britannia—were largely responsible for the pacification[44] of southern and central Britannia, as well as many of the unsuccessful excursions into the British-Scottish (then-Caledonian) north. Having participated in the quelling of the Boudiccan uprising in 61 CE where he served as a junior officer (*tribunus militum*),[45] Agricola went on, under his governorship, to pacify the Brigantes where he "swept right through Brigantian territory—and beyond"[46] without a great deal of fighting, being able to:

"Native Britons were forcibly relocated, and the indigenous social, cultural, and linguistic groups were split down the middle by the feature that would come to be known as Hadrian's Wall."

play groups off of one another—perhaps groups such as the Carvetti and Setantii in the northwest, and others such as the Tectoverdii, Lopocares, and Corionototae who have tentatively been assigned the territory in the northeast—indicating that the major military blows had already been struck [by the Romans] in this area.[47]

Following Agricola's campaigns, continued military efforts at both pacification and control, and a growing emigration of Roman citizens to the British frontier, the military infrastructure of the Roman army in Britain had, from the initial landing of 43 CE until the onset of the second century, grown unabated; and by the time Hadrian (*Publius Aelius Hadrianus Augustus*) succeeded Trajan (*Marcus Ulpius Traianus*) as Emperor of Rome in 117 CE, the logistical infrastructure for what would soon become Hadrian's Wall was largely already in place.

THE WALL(S)

Rob Collins noted that, "By AD 88, the Roman troops were withdrawn from northern Scotland to the Forth-Clyde isthmus, and by the early 2nd century, troops had been withdrawn from lower Scotland to the Tyne-Solway isthmus."[48] Roman military presence began to coalesce around the fortressed region of the Tyne-Solway isthmus, and, as Collins went on to note, "Upon withdrawing from Scotland, the northernmost concentration of garrisons was along the road connecting Corbridge to Carlisle, known since the Middle Ages as the Stanegate Road." The Stanegate road, a road that ran more or less parallel to the current location of Hadrian's Wall, was, as Richard Hingsley noted, a "fortified military road [which] was constructed just to the south of the line on which the Wall was later to be built."[49] In the narrow region from what is now Browness to South Shields, England, where the present day A69 and B6318 highways run from Newcastle upon Tyne to Carlisle, much of the Roman army in Britain was garrisoned in a series of forts—forts which were supported by a heavy infrastructure of roads and towns which, coupled with the Caledonian withdrawals, created a de facto militarized fron-

tier region along the Tyne-Solway narrows. Historians William Hanson and Gordon Maxwell noted that:

> Shortly after the beginning of the second century AD the Roman frontier in Britain seems to have rested on the Tyne-Solway isthmus, the most convenient east-west route south of the Forth-Clyde line. [...] The primary elements of the Trajanic frontier were the Flavian forts Carlisle and Corbridge, situated astride the two main routes into Scotland, together with the east-west road which connects them, known to us as the Stanegate.[50]

As the land around the burgeoning wall began to be cleared for construction, surveyed and readied, the native Britons were forcibly relocated, and the indigenous social, cultural, and linguistic groups were split down the middle by the feature that would come to be known as Hadrian's Wall. Hanson and Maxwell noted that the significance of the political apartheid enforced by the newly-constructed Wall would not have been lost on the local tribesman, where "the newly-built barrier seems to have cut across tribal territory belonging to the Brigantes, isolating a considerable portion of the tribe's lands lying in the lower dales of the Rivers Esk and Annan."[51] Further, the historian Richard Hingsley also observed that:

> The homes and settlements of the local people have been recognized and excavated in some numbers [...] but the relationship between these people and the Roman army and administration remains unclear. Substantial areas of land will have to be confiscated during the construction of the Roman military infrastructure. Roman roads, camps, and forts were enforced without discussion or negotiation [and the] [...] Roman army did very much whatever it wanted across this landscape, prior to, during, and after the construction of [Hadrian's] Wall.[52]

The Roman frontier zone that was to become Hadrian's Wall was, however, and as is the course with most things, an overdetermined phenomenon—and one which, at different periods of time, could be located in different regions of Britannia. Stephen Dyson recorded that:

Though Hadrian's Wall is a conspicuous linear feature, it did not mark the course of the frontier. Generally speaking, the Roman frontier occupied the middle of the island of Britain, with the Roman province (and later diocese) of *Britannia* only occupying the southern half of the island. Throughout the Roman occupation, then, the territory north of the Wall and Ireland to the west should be considered barbaricum."[53]

Yet, as the historian Stephen L. Dyson observed, in *The Creation of the Roman Frontier*, for most of us:

Hadrian's Wall symbolizes the Roman frontier. Massive and permanent, it separates the world of Rome from that of the barbarian [...] Yet walls and forts were only part of a larger diplomatic, military, political, social, and economic system that embraced both sides of the frontier and created a gradual transition from Roman to non-Roman society.[54]

The decision during the reign of Hadrian to construct a large scale wall just north, and parallel to, the Stanegate Road followed closely with the extant garrison in the region, the series of supportive forts across the isthmus, and Hadrian's own efforts at imperial consolidation, rather than expansion. "When Hadrian came to power," Rob Collins noted, "his apparent desire to stabilize imperial holdings led him to consolidate existing frontiers rather than initiate further conquest. The emperor visited Britain in AD 122, and the construction of Hadrian's Wall commenced, quite possibly following a plan designed by the emperor himself."[55] Richard Hingsley also noted that, "The Wall formed part of Hadrian's policy of bringing the expansion of the Roman empire to an end; fortifications were also being built along the German frontier at this time."[56] The Wall's construction took eight to ten years to complete,[57] and might not have been fully finished until the reign of Antoninus Pius (*Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius*) in 138 CE. Indeed, the Wall is thought to still have been under construction at the time of Hadrian's passing. The historian Adrian Goldsworthy noted that, "Hadrian's personal involvement in the decision to construct the Wall and in its design is clear. It is generally assumed that he gave the order after visiting the area, so that the surveying and construction began no earlier than 122."[58] Goldsworthy offered the caveat that since we know so little about the imperial planning processes surrounding large-scale works like the Wall, that construction may have started earlier than 122, and Hadrian's trip to the frontier that year was simply to inspect the Wall's construction.

The anatomy of the Wall itself was such that the stone curtain wall was not the primary feature—although arguably the most visible—but part of a larger wall complex which included a wall ditch, a military road, and a sub-complex known as the *vallum* which contained a series of mounds and ditches. While the original height of the stone curtain wall is unknown—as no section survives today at its original height—recent estimates suggest an approximate 3.6 meter height.[59] Given that the upper portion of the stone curtain wall is also unpreserved, it is, as Hinglsey observed, "unclear whether there was a walkway along the top or crenellations to defend those Roman soldiers who may have patrolled its line."[60] The Wall, and the complexes that surrounded it, were built by three Roman legions: the II *Augusta*, the VI *Victrix*, and the XX *Valeria Victrix*. Help was likely levied from the local populations—from the towns (*vici*) which grew up along the Wall region to support the soldiers and their families—and from the Romanized indigenous populations. The stone curtain wall, while initially begun at a width of 2.9 meters was, in places, reduced to 2.4 meters in width. The overall length of the wall was, from Segedunum to the shores of the Solway Firth, 80 Roman miles—117.5 km, or 73 standard miles. Adrian Goldsworthy noted that:

The western section for thirty-one Roman miles (c. forty-six km) from Bowness-on-Solway was built of turf, timber, and earth, with a rampart some twenty feet wide (six m) at its base. The line was then continued by a stone wall for forty-nine Roman miles (c. seventy-three km) to the east, eventually ending at Wallsend on the Tyne.[61]

Forts also punctuated the stone curtain wall, although this decision had not been planned from the wall's beginning. On this, Hingsley recorded

"The border limites of the Roman frontiers in Britain were not the historical limits of the Roman people themselves, but an

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that:

> It was not originally intended to place the forts on the line of the Wall but to maintain the pre-existing forts along the Stanegate in the hinterland as the main bases for the troops. However, prior to AD 126 it appears that a decision was made to construct forts at regular intervals along the Wall's course and to transfer the garrisons onto the Wall.[62]

This decision, Hingsley observed, is known today amongst Wall scholars as "the fort decision." Regular gateways and through-ways occurred on the line of the wall, primarily at the mile-castles and forts, but as Hingley noted, "at least two additional gateways at Port Gate and the Maiden Way are known."[63] Cross-boundary trade, immigration, travel occurred through these ports. The wall forts, or mile castles, and, by extension, the gates, were often associated with civilian extensive settlements known as *vici*. William Hanson and Gordon Maxwell noted that:

> The channels of movement open to the military were, of course, also applicable to the control of civilian traffic, and we must remember that the close supervision of this was probably the main day-to-day function of the running barrier. Passage across Hadrian's Wall was possible for all persons going peacefully about their lawful business, but only with the permission of the troops occupying

the milecastles.[64]

Hadrian's Wall, known in its day as the *Vallum Aelium*, was, functionally, a tool of Roman border management. While defense was of course implied by the very nature of the wall itself, its primary goal was not defensive in nature, but rather to control the flow of people and goods in and out of Roman territory. It was, at root, a territorial demarcation and was used in many of the same ways that modern states today utilize their border fortifications. John Collingwood Bruce, an early pioneer of Wall scholarship, and author of the seminal text *The Roman Wall*, made the argument, early on, that "the curtain Wall was designed at first to indicate where Roman territory ended, but this was supplemented by the 'secondary function [...] of being an obstacle to smugglers, or robbers, or other undesirables."[65] And further, in his influential text *Roman Britain*, Collingwood also argued that:

> In spite of the impressive appearance of this huge fortification [...] it was not in the ordinary sense a military work. It was not intended to stop invading armies of Caledonians, while Roman soldiers lined the parapet and repelled attempts at escalade [...] The Wall was an obstacle, but an obstacle not so much to armies as to smugglers [...] If we want an analogy in modern times, we shall find one not in the continuous lines of trench warfare but

artificial extension of the imperialist state predicated upon warfare, resource extraction, and a social subjugation of the native Britons."

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in the Indian 'customs-hedge' built by the English in 1843 for prevention of smuggling in salt.[66]

Hadrian's Wall, like the imperial border walls of the twenty-first century, was a tool of border management—a tool intended to create easily-regulated choke points in cross-territorial trade and immigration where the army could enforce Roman border policy. The primary historical themes of Hadrian's Wall were thus bound up with Roman finance capital, economy, immigration, regulation, management, and—secondarily—defense. As with its early 4th century BCE Servian Wall (*Murus Servii Tullii*), Rome's far-flung border wall in northern Britannia represented three similar motivations:

1. to demarcate Roman territory,

2. to preserve territorial integrity, and

3. to exercise military, political, and economic control over cross-border traffic[67]

Hadrian's Wall was not only a fortified demarcation—a limit set in stone and earth—but it represented, also, the Roman *imperial* conception of the border as one which required consummate economic control, regulation, delimitation, and soldiering. Hadrian's Wall thus represents a model for border studies in the twenty-first century, especially where the border fortifications of imperial polities are concerned, precisely due to

its economic characteristics. In Hadrian's Wall we see glimpses of the U.S.-Mexico border wall, with not only a similarity in management strategy, impetus, and purpose; but in meaning, signification, and implication as well—hints of an imperialism in ossification, written in stone and earth and metal.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

"The *right of landownership*," a young Karl Marx once rightly observed, "has its source in robbery."[68] The same could be said for the ways in which Rome engaged in its own methods of land acquisition and legal notions of land ownership. The border *limites* of the Roman frontiers in Britain were not the historical limits of the Roman people themselves, but an artificial extension of the imperialist state predicated upon warfare, resource extraction, and a social subjugation of the native Britons. On this, the political scientist Emmanuel Bruent-Jailly noted that:

> [T]he history of the Roman Empire is testimony to the fact that conquest was central to the differentiation between barbarism and civilization. Boundaries organised the Roman Empire according to a hierarchy of spaces—territories of varied dimensions and functions, which included settlements, cities, provinces and regions.[69]

"As an early template for the western imperialist state, Rome's notion of the border offers political ecology insights into present-day, imperial border regimes."

Imposition and Foreign Rule

The Stanegate region of the Tyne-Solway isthmus —the location of the *Vallum Aelium*—was, as referenced by Claudius Ptolemy's 150 CE map of the region, the territory of such tribes as the *Brigantes*, the *Votadini*, and the *Selgovae*; and the short-lived Antonine Wall seventy miles to the north on the Forth-Clyde isthmus was, as noted on the same map, peopled by the *Damnonii*. When empires such as Rome engaged in expansion, they did so not into uninhabited, depopulated lands, but lands which were rich in both resource and indigenous populations; lands which had to be robbed and taken over from their prior inhabitants on the order of finance capital, in the quest for the development—and robbery—of real capital. Thomas Nail observed that, "In particular, the border is defined by two intertwined social motions: expansion and expulsion."[70] Hadrian's Wall was similarly defined by such motions. Where border fortifications such as the military and economic installations of the Antonine and Hadrian's Walls are concerned, the Romans engaged both in the forced displacements of the native inhabitants as well as direct political and economic control by governorship and military occupation. The primary historical themes of the Roman dominion over the southern half of Britain then could thus be labeled as displacement, artificiality, and militaristic imposition.

As an imperialist polity, Rome's engagement with the border was one which lay upon a material foundation of economic and political exploitation of lands which did not, *a priori*, belong to Rome. The heretofore autonomy of Roman Britannia was thus a subjugation to foreign rule, and the Roman notion of the border can be derived from the ways in which the Romans engaged in border management and territorial occupation. As an early template for the western imperialist state, an analysis of Rome's material maintenance of their border limits offers the political ecologist much in the way of evidence for analysis; an analysis of Rome's border regime, for example, directly feeds an analysis of the present day border regime of the United States. Imperialism, and the logic of finance capital, emerge from the worst aspects of human greed—imperialism, in essence, is greed and rapaciousness made manifest in the repressive state apparatus.

In "Hadrian's Wall: Embodied Archaeologies of the Linear Monument," the archaeologists Claire Nesbit and Divya Tolia-Kelly observed that:

> The Romans' barrier could be seen as an ideological division, which may have become entrenched in the psyche of the people on either side of the Wall, creating an invasive/ defensive mindset. As Ahmed [...] asserts: "the politics of fear as well as hate is narrated as a bor-

der anxiety: fear speaks the language of 'floods' and 'swamps,' of being invaded by inappropriate others, against whom the nation must defend itself."[71]

Similar themes of invasion, floods, and swamps, for example, are ubiquitous—and not- shockingly familiar—in the contemporary right-wing discourse around border security in the United States in 2021. For example, the reactionary, disgraced demagogue Donald Trump "repeatedly warned that America was under attack by immigrants heading for the border. 'You look at what is marching up, that is an invasion!' he declared at one rally. 'That is an invasion!'"[72]

A political ecology of the imperial border, however, must turn this idealism on its head. While the rhetoric of civilization/barbarism or of "migrant caravans" is often used to sell the militarization of the border to the public, the real reason remains, in every case, the imperial machinations of finance capital which require—at the stage of imperial development where delimitation and ossification occur—that economic controls exist on the border to not only annex territory and exert militaristic dominance, but to control the flows of goods and people, and to secure real and working capital for the imperial society's financial élite. The romanticism of imperialism stands to be deconstructed by those who not only seek to understand it, but by those who also seek to dismantle its oppressive logics.

In the Marxist tradition, when we seek to both dethrone and subvert this problematic idealism used by the state to legitimize imperialism's material efforts, we often return to the great Hegel. On the Romans, Hegel once remarked that, within the bounds of the empire, "individuals were perfectly equal (slavery made only a trifling distinction), and without any political right. [...] Private Right developed and perfected this equality."[73] Hegel went onto contend that the individual private rights enjoyed by every Roman citizen in some way represented a logical extension of burgeoning Roman property rights—along with the resultant political individualization of the citizen—and that such a collection of individuals in fact operated as a sort of decentralized political organism,[74] where the:

Emperor *domineered* only, and could not be said to *rule*; for the equitable and moral medium between the sovereign and the subjects was wanting—the bond of a constitution and organization of the state, in which a gradation of circles of social life, enjoying independent recognition, exists in communities and provinces, which, devoting their energies to the general interest, exert an influence on the central government.[75]

Hegel's fabulously romanticized vision of the Romans, however, could not be further from the truth. As an exploitative imperial polity, Rome engaged in a foreign strategy of conquest and expansion, subjugation and domination, and rampant economic imperialization —a material centralization which led to the construction of border walls on Rome's far-flung borders, imperial ossification, and, eventually, to the decline and dismemberment of the state itself.

Thus, it is important to demystify Rome to understand it. Michael Parenti, in *The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People's History of Rome*, noted that:

Rome's social pyramid rested upon the backs of slaves (*servi*) who composed approximately one-third the population of Italy, with probably a smaller proportion within Rome proper. Their numbers were maintained by conquests, piratical kidnappings, and procreation by the slaves themselves. Slavery also was the final destination for individuals convicted of capital crimes, for destitute persons unable to repay debts, and for children sold off by destitute families. War captives were worked to death in the mines and quarries and on plantations (*latifundia*) at such a rate that their ranks were constantly on the wane.[76]

Rome was not an egalitarian society, where private citizens enjoyed unequalled sovereignty and political freedom; rather, it *exemplified* an oppressive social stratification which we may take as the *sine qua non* of imperialist society, where a moneyed and dominant social élite exercise their own social and political freedoms at the expense of a predominant class of working poor (*proletarii*) and slaves (*servi*). And, further, where this domi-

nant social élite— the financial élite—direct the foreign policy of the state towards bloodshed, conquest, and rabid consumption.

The class injustice, social oppression, and slavery endemic to Roman society were all harsh realities suffered by not only the Roman *servi* and *proletarii*, but by the bullied and subjugated peoples along Rome's frontiers as well. The romantic view that the *Pax Romana* offered a material peace (*pax*) to its subjects or its neighbors is, simply, "the self-serving illusions that any imperialistic system has of itself."[77] The foreign policy that emerged from the imperial state of Rome was a policy which emerged from a stratified, oppressive, and not-unfamiliar social organization where:

> as in any plutocracy, it was a disgrace to be poor and an honor to be rich. The rich, who lived parasitically off the labor of others, were hailed as men of quality and worth; while the impecunious, who struggled along on the paltry earnings of their own hard labor, were considered vulgar and deficient.[78]

Such a society—emblematic of all imperialist societies—could only develop a border strategy laden with themes of expansion, exclusion, hierarchy, and economic servitude. As an imperialist slave society, Rome relied upon the influx of foreign *servi* for the bulk of its internal labor force; for the rest it required only that the *proletarii* remain immiserated and in a precarious economic position in rank service to the financial and social élite. Such a society represented not only Rome's economic strategy, but also provided a model for later imperial states. The racism endemic to Rome's socioeconomic policy could only manifest itself in not only the social-hierarchical segregation, but in the physical, geographical segregation of Rome and the external *Other* as well. Thus did the Roman notions of separation— emblematized by the Roman notion of the border—both emerge from and represent such a social structure. Michael Parenti observed that:

> All slavocracies develop a racist ideology to justify their dehumanized social relationships.

In Rome, male slaves of any age were habitu-

ally addressed as *puer* or "boy." A similar degrading appellation was applied to slaves in ancient Greece and in the slavocracy of the United States, persisting into the postbellum segregationist South of the twentieth century. The slave as a low-grade being or subhuman is a theme found in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. In the minds of Roman slaveholders, the *servi*—including the foreigners who composed the larger portion of the slave population—were substandard in moral and mental capacity, a notch or two above animals. Cicero assures us that Jews, Syrians, and all other Asian barbarians are "born to slavery."[79]

Where an imperialist state seeks to engage in such firm social distinctions—the social superstructure of its oppressive economic organization—there, too, does it relate to land, to economy, and to the foreign *Other* in an analogous fashion. Rome's utilization of the militarized and fortified borderline in northern Britannia is a key demonstration of this social-geographical relationship. And thus, from this, we can also contend that Rome's border regime—its strategy of border management—entailed a firm relationship to the Roman economy; i.e., the ways in which Rome regulated its workforce and organized the state in service of finance and real capital. The politics of the cross-border movement of Roman labor forces are thus reflected both in Rome's socio-political organization as well as its economic and labor structures. On this, Etienne Balibar contended that:

> Borderlines which allow a clear distinction between the national (domestic) and the foreigner express sovereignty as a power to attach populations to territories in a stable or regulated manner, to "administrate" the territory through the control of the population, and, conversely, to govern the population through the division and the survey of the territory.[80]

And as Claire Nesbit and Divya Tolia-Kelly observed, "[Hadrian's Wall scholars] Breeze and Dobson [...] argue that the number of gateways through the monument indicate that the Wall was designed to control movement across the border

"Parasitism, Lenin noted, is characteristic of imperialism. The parasitism emblematized by the imperialist border wall is reflected in the fact that the imperial border wall is one

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rather than to prevent it."[81] Simply put, every empire requires both mobile and cheap labor forces where its reproduction and expansion is concerned. Economies of imperial expansion and annexation, predicated on themes of both exploitation and expulsion, commodification, growth, and domination, thus *require* border regimes which control the flow of goods, capital, and forces of labor.

The Roman imperial model is the template for present-day border regimes in the imperialist-capitalist era. On this, Balibar commented that:

> And perhaps this should be no complete surprise if we remember that the idea of a capitalist world system (beginning with the discussions on *Weltwirtschaft* and world economy) was first elaborated as a "determinate negation" (as Hegelians would say) of the idea of a world empire (i.e., an empire which claims to represent the sovereign source of power, peace, civilization, amid less civilized populations, whose prototype, in the West, was the Roman Empire).[82]

The story of Hadrian's Wall tells us several distinct things about the ways in which the Roman state utilized its border walls. Hadrian's Wall—along with the early republican Servian Walls (*Murus Servii Tullii*), the Antonine Wall (*Vallum Antonini*), and the various wall fortifications along the *Limes Germanicus* (within the Roman provinces of *Germania Inferior*, *Germania Superior*, and *Raetia*)—fulfilled the following functions: 1. Rome's border walls not only demarcated Roman territory and preserved Rome's alleged territorial integrity, but they 2. provided a material base of operations for the Romans to exercise military, political, and financial control over their provinces which abutted non-Roman territory. To these, we add the important third point that Rome's border regime also allowed the Roman state to create a series of economic and immigratory choke-points through which the Romans could then monitor and control the cross-border flow of goods and labor forces. As Collingwood argued,[83] the wall itself was not, as commonly believed, a defensive structure; its primary purposes, as covered in the previous section, were both economic and immigratory in nature. And Nail, too, observed that:

> The primary function of Hadrian's Wall was not to defend against barbarian invasion but to regulate the ports of entry into the empire and collect taxes from those who wanted to pass across its numerous gates built at each milecastle. [...] This had at least three intended effects: (1) to retain skilled or educated colonial subjects from defecting to the other side, (2) to make new colonial subjects "enjoy" being Roman by restricting their movement, and (3) to restrict the flow of information across the wall to the barbarians so that they

which is constructed on occupied and conquered land: land which is not only exploited and oppressed, but demographically and environmentally shattered by the wall."

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did not learn the location of camps or supply lines.[84]

Where capital, class, and exploitation come together in the key apparatuses of the imperialist state, there too must the bordering strategies follow suit. The Roman state, and its economic and militaristic border regimes, provide an enduring model for the modern imperialist state —to better understand Rome is to better understand imperialism in the modern era, especially where the oppressive implementation of border walls are concerned.

TOWARDS A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF THE IMPERIAL BORDER

"Sovereign power," observed Wendy Brown in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty:*

> carries the fantasy of an absolute and enforceable distinction between inside and outside. This distinction in turn depends upon sovereignty's defiance of spatial or boundary porousness and of temporal interruption or multivalence. Political sovereignty, like that of God, entails absolute jurisdictional control and endurance over time. The sovereign can be attacked, but not penetrated without being undone, challenged, but not interrupted without being toppled. In this respect, sovereignty appears as a supremely mascu-

line political fantasy (or fallacy) of mastery: Penetration, pluralization, or interruption are its literal undoing.[85]

When an imperial polity is unable to accept a fluid geographical border, and the indigenous populations who dwell within and upon those geographies, there must it erect a fortification to stem such fluidity and indigeneity. And when a state must erect an extremely expensive, large-scale border wall—expensive both in terms of manpower, military and police presence, surveillance, and physical materials—there too does the state seem to *implicitly* admit that its eventual decline is nigh; that it has reached its material limit; and that it can expand no more. It admits by implication that it can no longer tolerate the free travel of goods and people across its limits, but that these limits must in fact become highly regulated via a series of forced choke points. All of this, the state does in the service of capital—for the state is a weapon wielded by its ruling élite. The ruling financial élite of the imperialist state wield the state for the purposes of imperial capital.

The real expression of imperialist power—its apex reached in the imperial state—thus requires, at root, absolute jurisdictional and economic control over its frontiers. It can accept no less.

"Ruined walls," the historian David Frye noted in *Walls: A History of Civilization in Blood and Brick*,

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"appear all over the world. The materials—sometimes brick, sometimes stone, sometimes simply tamped earth—vary with the locale, but everywhere we find the same pattern: obscure barriers, adorned only by their colorful nicknames, nearly always facing desolate wastes."[86] Frye went on to note, wrongly, that "Civilized folk had erected barriers to exclude them [barbarians] in an astonishing array of countries [...] Not a single textbook observed the nearly universal correlation between civilization and walls."[87] Yet recent scholarship by political scientists Ron Hassner and Jason Wittenberg has easily solved this riddle:

> Why do states erect fortified boundaries? We conclude that most are built by wealthy states to keep out unwanted migrants, particularly those originating from Muslim- majority states. Contrary to conventional wisdom, states that construct such barriers do not tend to suffer disproportionately from terrorism, nor do they tend to be involved in a significant number of territorial disputes. The primary motivation for constructing fortified barriers is not territory or security but *economics*.[88]

It is no great mystery then why the great border walls of history—Hadrian's Wall notwithstanding—have faced so-called "wastes," and have similarly encircled so-called "civilized" lands. The answer, simply, is that those with the resources to produce and reproduce their material existences seek to not only retain these resources for themselves but to also prevent the pervasive "Other" from access to those resources. Border walls were, and are, built by the wealthy as a bulwark against the poor and as a strategy of wealth extraction from abutting poorer nations—a strategy of economic control by which cross-border migration, capital, and economy is regulated in such a way as to benefit the rich at the expense of the poor.

The fortified Roman limits of the Hadrian and Antonine Walls were no different. Rather than viewing the historical world through a lens of "civilized man" and "barbarian"—as the Romans did—we must, *contra* Frye, salvage what Hegel called a *philosophical* approach to history, as opposed to a *narrative* one; a philosophical approach in which:

> Thought must be subordinate to what is given, to the realities of fact; that this is its basis and guide: while Philosophy dwells in the region of self-produced ideas, without reference to actuality. [...] [I]t is the business of history simply to adopt into its records what is
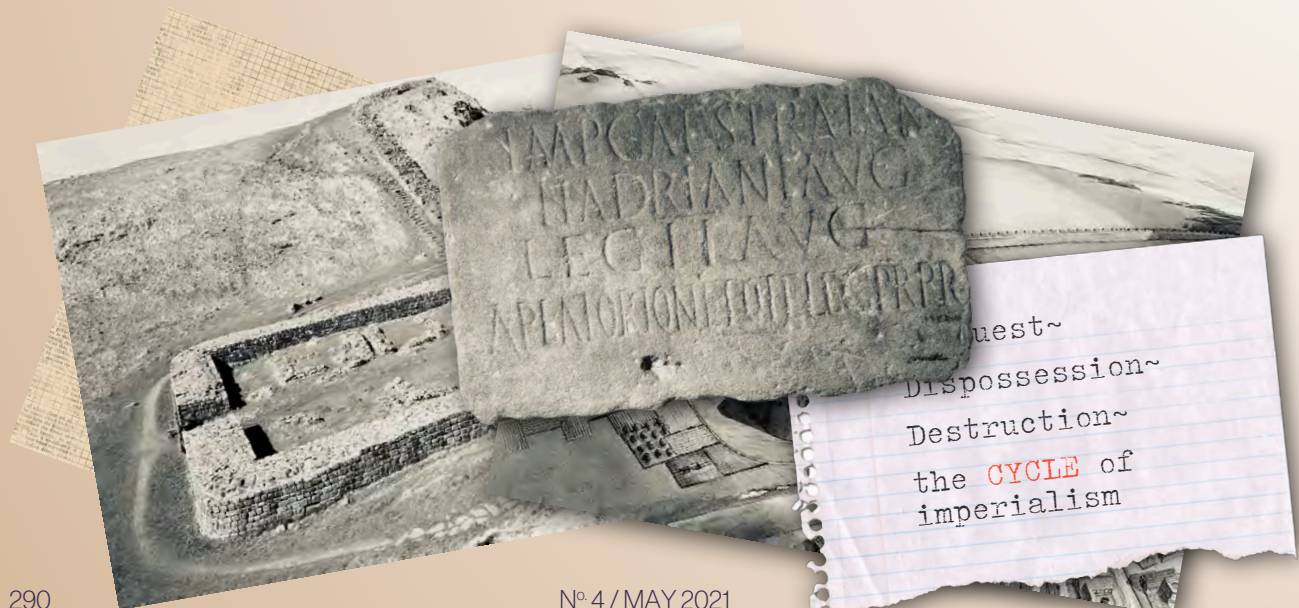
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and has been, actual occurrences and transactions; [...] as it strictly adheres to its data [...][89]

Our analysis of the past must rely upon the material reality of what was, coupled with the nuance of present-day data analysis where material reality is concerned. Thus, when we *do* the history of border walls, we must admit that their history will by necessity entail economic entanglements; and we must avoid the idealistic notion that walls emerged to separate "civilization from barbarism," as such a notion will always ever entail classist and racist connotations.

Border walls as a focus of political ecological study are thus implicitly entangled with the impetus of their construction. Economically, border walls are, and have been, primarily erected by those wealthy and "civilized" *few* to exclude those subaltern, "barbarian," and poor *many*. And those very same walls exist to control the cross-border flow of goods and people in an effort to maintain control over the internal and external economy of the walled state. Political scientists David Carter and Paul Poast further emphasized this fact by noting that:

> Wall construction is explained by cross-border economic disparities. Significant economic disparities between states create in-

centives to illegally transport people or move goods readily available in the poorer country but highly regulated and relatively expensive in the richer country. We find that economic disparities have a substantial and significant effect on the presence of a physical wall that is independent of formal border disputes and concerns over instability from civil wars in neighbors.[90]

Even the disgraced ex-President of the United States, failed reality show star and exploitative real estate mogul Donald Trump, hinted at this fact by noting that, in relationship to the U.S.- Mexico border wall:

> Some have suggested a barrier is immoral. Then why do wealthy politicians build walls, fences, and gates around their homes? They don't build walls because they hate the people on the outside, but because they love the people on the inside. The only thing that is immoral is the politicians to do nothing and continue to allow more innocent people to be so horribly victimized.[91]

As border walls in the current imperial American era entail this timeless imperialist and economic quality—a reflection of the Roman strategy— and, where border walls also reflect not only a

"The physical division of labor forces by way of a great walling-off—while side-stepping the national question— not only divides demographic cohesion but devalues labor itself outside of the wall."

waning sovereignty but a potential future collapse and withdrawal from the border region altogether, it serves political ecology well to examine the ways in which the imperial Roman state utilized its border fortifications in Britannia.

CONCLUSIONS

"Parasitism," Lenin noted, "is characteristic of imperialism."[92] The parasitism embodied by the imperialist implementation of the border wall is one which is reflected in the fact that the imperial border wall is one which is constructed on *occupied* land; a land which is not only exploited but also demographically and environmentally shattered by the wall itself. The imperial border wall reflects imperialism in this way—it exists as a tool in service of capital extraction and control. The imperial border wall is not a wall of defense or of ideological protection; it is not a wall in the way the *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* of the German Democratic Republic was a wall. The imperial border wall is a wall which serves exploitation, extraction, and the control of goods and labor forces—it serves these, in every case, for the benefit of the financial élite and for financial capital more generally. In short, the border walls of imperialism serve the state, which itself serves the state's ruling class.

Lenin wrote that the deepest economic foundation of imperialism is monopoly. In the capitalist era, "[t]his is capitalist monopoly, i.e., monopoly which has grown out of capitalism and which exists in the general environment of capitalism, commodity production and competition, in permanent and insoluble contradiction to this general environment. Nevertheless, like all monopoly, it inevitably engenders a tendency of stagnation and decay."[93] The border walls of the imperialist state—Hadrian's Wall, the Antonine Wall, and now the US-Mexico Border Wall, similarly engender a tendency of stagnation and decay—they emblematize and foreshadow these in the same way that the imperialist state emblematizes and foreshadows its own decay. Imperialism, Lenin contended, "means the partitioning of the world, and the exploitation of other countries [...] which means high monopoly profits for a handful of very

rich countries, [making] it economically possible to bribe the upper strata of the proletariat, and thereby fosters, gives shape to, and strengthens opportunism."[94] Imperialism requires a great carving-up of heretofore autonomous and indigenous lands; it entails, by its very nature, their partitioning and exploitation. The great border walls of the imperialist state not only act as material partitions, they "create privileged sections also among the workers, and to detach them from the broad masses of the proletariat,"[95] as Lenin observed of imperialism more generally. The physical division of labor forces by way of a great walling-off—while side-stepping the national question—divides the international proletariat in ways which both create and devalue labor forces outside of the wall; it creates a siphoning effect where labor forces are compelled by economic inequalities and devaluations to seek employment inside the wall at a wage far lower than the labor forces *inside* the walled territory. The border walls of imperialism contribute to the extraction of super-profits for the financial élite and for the state—one and the same—and contribute more widely to environmental destruction, habitat fragmentation, and biodiversity loss.

An explicitly anti-imperial political ecology of the imperial border—the goal to which this paper humbly contributes—is one which does not seek a reform of the imperial border, but a destruction thereof. The reform of such a system is, as Lenin noted, "a deception, [and] a 'pious wish,'"[96] divorced from all material reality and from the actual oppression of those peoples and lands imperialism claims as its own. "Imperialism is the epoch of finance capital and of monopolies, which introduce everywhere the striving for domination, not for freedom. Whatever the political system, the result of these tendencies is everywhere reaction and an extreme intensification of antagonisms in this field."[97] It is a system which, in the efforts of a great global partitioning, oppression, and exploitation, must not be allowed to flourish—its walls and its partitions must in every case be opposed. For while the walls of imperialism both imply and foretell their own breaking-apart, they often need a push.

ENDNOTES

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3. Brown, Wendy. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. p. 98.

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8. Shotter, David. *The Roman Frontier in Britain: Hadrian's Wall, the Antonine Wall, and Roman Policy in the North*. p. 3.

9. *Ibid*. 3

10. *Ibid*. 3

11. *Ibid*. 3

12. Strabo. *Geōgraphiká*. p. 257 .

13. Lenin, V.I. *Imperialism*. Ch. 7.

14. *Ibid*.

15. *Ibid*.

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