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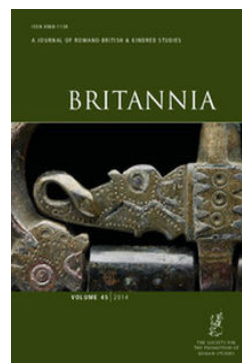
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Observations on Cartimandua

By DAVID BRAUND

CARTIMANDUA first appears in the historical record in A.D. 51, in which year she handed Caratacus to the Romans. She was already ruler of the Brigantes: how long she had ruled is not known, but it is quite possible that she was in power even before Claudius' invasion in A.D. 43.¹ The Brigantes seem to have been a federation: how close-knit this federation was and how far and firmly Cartimandua's authority extended over it must be matters of some doubt.² Her history after A.D. 51 has often been narrated by some of the greatest students of Roman Britain: it comes as something of a surprise, therefore, to discover that this latter part of her career also raises major difficulties. For knowledge of this portion of her career, we depend almost entirely on two passages of Tacitus: *Ann.* xii 40 and *Hist.* iii 45, written first of course. The central difficulty is simple enough: how are these two passages to be related?

In a recent article, S. Mitchell has performed the valuable service of collating and discussing the various ways in which scholars have sought to relate the passages, often, apparently, without realizing that any difficulty exists. As Mitchell observes, for all this variety, an *opinio communis* may be discerned, according to which Cartimandua's career after A.D. 51, in outline, runs as follows. After the Caratacus-affair she prospered and broke with her consort Venutius. Venutius attacked her, but was repelled by Roman forces (*Ann.* xii 40). The precise dates of these events are uncertain, for Tacitus has temporarily abandoned his annalistic framework, but, since A. Didius Gallus was legate when Venutius was repelled, these events must have taken place between A.D. 51 and A.D. 57, when Gallus left office. More than ten years later, in A.D. 69, Venutius and Cartimandua fell out again: it is inferred that they had somehow effected a reconciliation in the intervening years which now broke down. Cartimandua took Venutius' armour-bearer, Vellocatus, in his place: Venutius responded with force as he had done in the fifties. Once again Roman forces came to Cartimandua's aid, but could do no more than rescue her: the kingdom was left to Venutius (*Hist.* iii 45).³

On this, the standard view, there is a certain similarity between the events of the fifties and the events of A.D. 69. Stressing this similarity, Mitchell rejects the standard view and offers his own interpretation of the two passages. He argues that the events attributed to the fifties and to A.D. 69 were in fact the very same events: they could, therefore, have happened only

¹ The best account of Cartimandua's reign remains I. A. Richmond, *JRS* xliv (1954), 43–52, though modifications are now necessary. On her early years, *ibid.* 43–7: note that the coinage once attributed to the Brigantes and Cartimandua, which Richmond uses, is now generally agreed to belong to the Coritani: see S. S. Frere, *Britannia* (revd. edn. 1978), 85 on the coinage and for a balanced sketch of her early years. Note now also K. Branigan (ed.), *Rome and the Brigantes: the impact of Rome on Northern England* (1980).

² On the extent of her kingdom and its federate nature, Richmond, *op. cit.* (note 1), 44–6; cf. Frere, *op. cit.* (note 1), 94, observing the difficulty of controlling the whole federation. Compare the difficulties of Teuta of Illyria in a similar situation: H. J. Dell, *Historia* xvi (1967), 344–58. P. Salway, *Roman Britain* (1981), 108 expresses some doubt as to whether the Brigantes were indeed a federation: it is true that this is not proven.

³ S. Mitchell, *Liverpool Classical Monthly* iii (1978), 215–19, esp. 216–17. His full exposition of scholarly views will not be reiterated here. It will suffice to observe that supporters of the standard view include Richmond, *op. cit.* (note 1), 48–52, Frere, *op. cit.* (note 1), 97, 101, 116 and 119, and Salway, *op. cit.* (note 2), 133. But dissidents remain: the most recent treatment places Cartimandua's introduction of Vellocatus in the fifties: G. Webster, *Rome Against Caratacus: the Roman campaigns in Britain A.D. 48–58* (1981), 89–90.

once, so that Tacitus must have set one passage in the wrong place. He prefers to attribute these events to A.D. 69 and thus to suppose that, for whatever reason, Tacitus has set them a decade or more too early in his *Annals*, though he had already placed them correctly in his *Histories*. In other words, on Mitchell's view, there was no break between Venutius and Cartimandua in the fifties.⁴

Evidently a fresh examination of the two key passages is necessary: it will be argued that neither the standard view nor that of Mitchell has it entirely right and that the history of Cartimandua must be modified. The passages must be quoted in full:

'Sed post captum Caratacum praecipuus scientia rei militaris Venutius, e Brigantum civitate, ut supra memoravi, fidusque diu et Romanis armis defensus, cum Cartimanduum reginam matrimonio teneret; mox orto discidio et statim bello etiam adversus nos hostilia induerat. Sed primo tantum inter ipsos certabatur, callidisque Cartimandua artibus fratrem ac propinquos Venutii intercepit. Inde accensi hostes, stimulante ignominia ne feminae imperio subderentur, valida et lecta armis iuventus regnum eius invadunt. Quod nobis praevisum, et missae auxilio cohortes acre proelium fecere, cuius initio ambiguo finis laetior fuit. Neque dispari eventu pugnatum a legione, cui Caesius Nasica praeerat; nam Didius, senectute gravis et multa copia honorum, per ministros agere et arcere hostem satis habebat.'

(*Ann.* xii 40. 2-7)

and:

'Ea discordia et crebris belli civilis rumoribus Britanni sustulere animos auctore Venutio, qui super insitam ferociam et Romani nominis odium propriis in Cartimanduum reginam stimulis accendebatur. Cartimandua Brigantibus imperitabat, pollens nobilitate; et auxerat potentiam postquam capto per dolum rege Carataco instruxisse triumphum Claudii Caesaris videbatur. Inde opes et rerum secundarum luxus; spreto Venutio (is fuit maritus) armigerum eius Vellocatum in matrimonium regnumque accepit. Concussa statim flagitio domus; pro marito studia civitatis, pro adultero libido reginae et saevitia. Igitur Venutius accitis auxiliis, simul ipsorum Brigantum defectione in extremum discrimen Cartimanduum adduxit. Tum petita a Romanis praesidia. Et cohortes alaeque nostrae variis proeliis exemere tamen periculo reginam; regnum Venutio, bellum nobis relictum.'

(*Hist.* iii 45)⁵

⁴ Mitchell, *op. cit.* (note 3), esp. 218-19.

⁵ The following are the translations of Church and Brodribb. Of course, the *Histories* were written before the *Annals*: After the capture of Caratacus, Venutius of the Brigantes, as I have already mentioned, was pre-eminent in military skill; he had long been loyal to Rome and had been defended by our arms while he was united in marriage to the queen Cartimandua. Subsequently a quarrel broke out between them, followed instantly by war, and he then assumed a hostile attitude also towards us. At first, however, they simply fought against each other, and Cartimandua by cunning stratagems captured the brothers and kinsfolk of Venutius. This enraged the enemy, who were stung with shame at the prospect of falling under the dominion of a woman. The flower of their youth, picked out for war, invaded her kingdom. This we had foreseen; some cohorts were sent to her aid and a sharp contest followed, which was at first doubtful but had a satisfactory termination.

The legion under the command of Cæsius Nasica fought with a similar result. For Didius, burdened with years and covered with honours, was content with acting through his officers and merely holding back the enemy.

(*Ann.* xii 40. 2-7)

These dissensions, and the continual rumours of civil war, raised the courage of the Britons. They were led by one Venutius, who, besides being naturally high-spirited, and hating the name of Rome, was fired by his private animosity against Queen Cartimandua. Cartimandua ruled the Brigantes in virtue of her illustrious birth; and she strengthened her throne, when, by the treacherous capture of king Caratacus, she was regarded as having given its chief distinction to the triumph of Claudius Cæsar. Then followed wealth and the self-indulgence of prosperity. Spurning her husband Venutius, she made Vellocatus, his armour-bearer, the partner of her bed and throne. By this enormity the power of her house was at once shaken to its base. On the side of the husband were the affections of the people, on that of the adulterer, the lust and savage temper of the Queen. Accordingly Venutius collected some auxiliaries, and, aided at the same time by a revolt of the Brigantes, brought Cartimandua into the utmost peril. She asked for some Roman troops, and our auxiliary infantry and cavalry, after fighting with various success, contrived to rescue the Queen from her peril. Venutius retained the kingdom, and we had the war on our hands.

(*Hist.* iii 45)

As we have seen the events narrated in *Ann.* xii 40 are firmly set in the fifties by the mention of Gallus:⁶ Mitchell's view, that they are set there erroneously, must be kept back as a last resort. We may, therefore, proceed by provisionally accepting the standard view on the first passage.

The second passage is more problematic. Tacitus' first concern in this passage is with the British rising of which Venutius was the inspiration: it is analysis of Venutius' motives in A.D. 69 that brings Tacitus to his relationship with Cartimandua. The main point to grasp is that Tacitus' story of their relationship is evidently to some extent a 'flash-back', returning to the events of the fifties narrated in the *Annals*: mention of the Caratacus-affair puts this much beyond question. What must be decided is how far the 'flash-back' continues. At the time of Venutius' rising in A.D. 69, Cartimandua was still in power. Mitchell stresses the imperfects, *imperitabat* and *accendebatur*, which suggest as much:⁷ indeed, Venutius' hostility towards her is only relevant if she figured in the events of A.D. 69. However, though in power at the beginning of the chapter, she is ousted at the end. Evidently the 'flash-back' has terminated at some intervening point in the chapter and at that point we have returned to the events of A.D. 69. There is only one place where this can have happened. Tacitus proceeds directly from the Caratacus-affair to the wealth and luxury that followed (*inde*). Thence we return to Venutius. It is at this point that we return to the events of A.D. 69. It was in that year (or just previously) that Cartimandua took Vellocatus in Venutius' place. Reaction within the kingdom was immediate (*statim*) and in Venutius' favour. It was in response to this situation (*igitur*) that Venutius attacked. In dire straits, Cartimandua appealed to the Romans, who rescued her but left Venutius in power among the Brigantes. Tacitus' narrative from the introduction of Vellocatus to the rescue of Cartimandua forms a close-knit account which serves to explain and develop his statement that Venutius was angry with her.

Confusion has been caused, I suggest, by Tacitus' *spreto Venutio (is fuit maritus)*, which stands at the very point where he leads the reader from the events of the fifties back to his main concern in the chapter, A.D. 69. The standard view, not unreasonably, takes the phrase very closely with the narrative that follows. It is supposed that Cartimandua and Venutius somehow effected a reconciliation at some time between the events of the fifties and A.D. 69, when the reconciliation broke down and Cartimandua took Vellocatus in Venutius' place: a good deal is thus added to what Tacitus actually says. Given the violence of their break in the fifties, the supposed reconciliation would have been a considerable feat. But it is not in fact necessary to suppose all this. It has been shown that, in Tacitus' very compressed text, the phrase stands precisely at the gap between the fifties and A.D. 69: Tacitus' compression makes it uncertain whether it is to be taken with the events of the fifties or those of A.D. 69. Both are possible: in neither case need a reconciliation be supposed. If, as usual, the phrase is taken closely with the events of A.D. 69, it must be stressed that *spreto Venutio* means no more than that Cartimandua 'scorned' him or, still weaker, 'paid no attention to' him or 'disregarded' him.⁸ This she did by replacing him with his erstwhile armour-bearer: observe

⁶ Note also A. R. Birley, *Britannia* iv (1973), 181 on Nasica.

⁷ Mitchell, op. cit. (note 3), 217-18.

⁸ See *OLD s.v. 'sperno'*. Richmond, op. cit. (note 1), 52 is surely correct that the lowly position suggested by Tacitus' 'armour-bearer' is misleading. It has been suggested that Vellocatus may even have been a slave (Webster, op. cit. (note 3), 90), but if Tacitus had had any idea that Vellocatus was a slave, he would surely have made the most of it. The whole tale of Cartimandua and Venutius is told as if their relationship was simply a romantic one, as Richmond, op. cit. (note 1), 50 observes; there is also a hint of that favourite theme, luxury and the corruption it brings with it: cf. R. Syme, *Tacitus* (1958), 373, 444. C. de Filippis, *RSA* viii (1978), 51-62 argues that Tacitus is led by his particular prejudices to portray Cartimandua in too negative and hostile a fashion.

Tacitus' word-order which stresses Vellocatus' previous position.⁹ No previous reconciliation need be inferred. Alternatively, given the compression of the text, the phrase might relate to the break of the fifties, when Cartimandua might also be said to have 'scorned' Venutius. Indeed, Tacitus may have chosen this phrase and placed it at the bridge-point between the events of the fifties and A.D. 69 precisely because it briefly encapsulates Cartimandua's attitude towards Venutius at both times. Tacitus has been criticized for his compression in this chapter, but it must be appreciated that in the context of A.D. 69, the affairs of the Brigantes were of relatively marginal interest to him: the previous history of Cartimandua and Venutius was still more marginal.¹⁰

The similarities between the two passages which have caused so much concern are of no great importance.¹¹ It must first be appreciated that close similarities between two Tacitean passages need not mean that the same events are narrated in those passages, *pace* Mitchell: it has recently been observed that Tacitus is prone to what has become known as self-imitation.¹² Moreover, in the particular case of *Ann.* xii 40 and *Hist.* iii 45 the similarities are heavily outweighed by the dissimilarities. Of course, these passages have in common Caratacus and hostility between Cartimandua and Venutius, but that is hardly significant, for the whole scenario of A.D. 69 is different from that of the fifties. In the *Annals* Cartimandua captures Venutius' relatives: in the *Histories* these relatives are not mentioned, but Vellocatus appears, who is not mentioned in the *Annals*. In the *Annals* Venutius' attack is launched from outside the kingdom (albeit with Brigantes other than Venutius himself): in the *Histories* it is combined with an internal uprising. Again, while Roman forces were involved on both occasions, the details are very different. In the *Annals* they had anticipated Venutius' attack, while in the *Histories* Cartimandua requested them after Venutius' invasion. Moreover, the forces involved are different. In the *Annals* there were a legion and cohorts, but in the *Histories* there were only cohorts and cavalry. Nor is it particularly remarkable that Cartimandua, having benefited from Roman military support against Venutius in the fifties, should call upon it again for the same purpose in A.D. 69.¹³ Finally, of course, the outcome of the two affairs was different: in the fifties Venutius was repelled, but in A.D. 69 it was Cartimandua who had to flee, leaving the kingdom to Venutius. In the face of such dissimilarities, the similarities that may be traced, such as they are, are quite insufficient to support the view that *Ann.* xii 40 is a misplaced doublet of *Hist.* iii 45.

The evidence of *Ann.* xii 40, that there was trouble among the Brigantes in the fifties, may be further supported by a neglected passage of the *Apocolocyntosis*, probably written by Seneca in the early years of Nero's reign, the middle to late fifties. It is entirely likely that Seneca already had financial interests in Britain when he wrote: if so, he may very well have taken a special interest in events there. The *Apocolocyntosis* is a savage, often unfair, satire on the reign of Claudius.¹⁴ Claudius' greatest military achievement was, of course, the invasion of

⁹ K. Wellesley (ed.), *Cornelius Tacitus – The Histories, Book III* (1972), 139 seems to prefer this second alternative.

¹⁰ For the criticism, Wellesley, *ibid.*

¹¹ *Pace* Mitchell, *op. cit.* (note 3), esp. 217, where he plays down the dissimilarities observed by E. Harrison, *CQ* i (1907), 305–7.

¹² See Tony Woodman in David West and Tony Woodman (eds.), *Creative imitation and Latin literature* (1979), 143–55.

¹³ Note Tacitus' description of Venutius himself in the fifties as *fidusque diu et Romanis armis defensus* (*Ann.* xii 40. 3): Tacitus seems to have narrated this in a lost portion of his *Annals*.

¹⁴ On the *Apocolocyntosis* and the problems it raises, see M. T. Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics* (1976), 129–33. On Seneca and Britain, *idem*, 232.

Britain:¹⁵ the invasion is duly satirized, though not perhaps as extensively as one might have expected:

‘Ille (sc. Claudius) *Britannos ultra noti*
litora ponti
et caeruleos scuta Brigantes
dare Romuleis colla catenis
iussit et ipsum nova Romanae
iura securis tremere Oceanum.’

(*Apoc.* 12 lines 13–18)¹⁶

These lines are part of a mock funeral dirge for Claudius. The satirical humour of the rest of the dirge is obvious enough: it is full of irony and wild exaggeration.¹⁷ But, at first sight, these lines are more problematic: one wonders why the Brigantes should be picked out for special attention. It is true that Claudius’ forces had not completely subjugated them, but to say as much is hardly the ironic exaggeration found elsewhere in the dirge. However, special mention of the Brigantes would be entirely appropriate if news had recently reached Rome of Venutius’ first attack upon Cartimandua and the involvement of a Roman legion and cohorts in hard fighting among the Brigantes. The dirge would thus praise Claudius for his subjugation of Britain and the Brigantes in particular at a time when it had become only too apparent that the Brigantes were very far from utter subjugation: the hypothesis could be better tested if the events of the fifties and the composition of the *Apocolocyntosis* could be dated with more precision.¹⁸

Cartimandua’s fate after her rescue in A.D. 69 has recently received some attention. Salway observes, ‘It has been suggested that the Roman intention was at some stage to house Cartimandua under protection at Chester’. He gives no reference for this suggestion, but probably alludes to the tentative suggestion of Nicholas Reed to that effect.¹⁹ Reed suggests that the so-called ‘elliptical building’ at Chester was intended as a residence for Cartimandua but was left unfinished in A.D. 79 when the aged queen died. But it must be stressed that there is nothing to connect this building with Cartimandua and the known facts about the two are not consistent. Cartimandua was rescued in A.D. 69, but the building was not begun until A.D. 74 at the earliest: *prima facie*, it would be rather odd if the Romans had finally decided to build a new residence for the ageing queen, who might die before it was completed, as happened on Reed’s view. An inscription from Chester is adduced to give weight to the argument. But the inscription is so fragmentary that its contents are quite unknown. However, the letters FEN are legible: Reed suggests that we should read FEM and that these letters formed the first half of the word FEMINA. The inscription, he proceeds, may have related the history of Cartimandua, presumably in a manner favourable to her. But these are large assumptions: it will perhaps suffice to observe that as a description of Cartimandua, who even

¹⁵ *Contra* Salway, op. cit. (note 3), 106, although Caesar had set the precedent for the invasion, he was not Claudius’ ancestor, by adoption or otherwise.

¹⁶ Britons recur at *Apoc.* 3. 3 and Britain appears at *Apoc.* 8. 3, where Claudius’ temple at Colchester is belittled.

¹⁷ See C. F. Russo, *L. Annaei Senecae, Divi Claudii* ἈΠΟΚΟΛΟΚΥΝΤΩΣΙΣ (5th edn., repr. 1970), 111–15.

¹⁸ It is possible that the allusion is only to the earlier movement among the Brigantes in A.D. 48, but this was a small matter, swiftly dealt with: Tac., *Ann.* xii 32. 4. Reference to the Britons as a whole may well be an ironic allusion to Caratacus. Further, A. A. Barrett, *American Journ. Phil.* c (1979), 538–40 argues with some plausibility that there was a significant revolt in A.D. 47 among Britons south of the Severn and Trent.

¹⁹ Salway, op. cit. (note 3), 133 n. 3; Nicholas Reed in *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms II: Vorträge des 10. Internationalen Limeskongresses in der Germania Inferior* (1977), 41–3.

without her kingdom could claim the title *regina*, the word *femina* would have been little short of an insult.²⁰

In conclusion, Cartimandua's career from A.D. 51 should now be traced as follows. After the Caratacus-affair she prospered and broke with Venutius, whose subsequent attack she repelled with Roman support. They were still at loggerheads when, in A.D. 69 or just before, Cartimandua replaced Venutius with Vellacatus. Within the kingdom, Vellacatus' promotion, according to Tacitus, caused an uprising, while Venutius, aware of the preoccupations of the legions, attacked Cartimandua a second time. Cartimandua sought Roman aid once more, but received only enough to effect her flight. Venutius was left in power among the Brigantes; what became of Cartimandua is not known.

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²⁰ For the inscription and the circumstances of its discovery, see D. F. Petch, *Journ. Chester Arch. Soc.* lvii (1970-1), 3-26, including the specifically epigraphical discussion of D. J. Robinson (24-6). Robinson takes the inscription to refer to civilian administration in Chester: in particular, it should be noted that both he and R. P. Wright (*ibid.*) are very definite that we should read FEN, not FEM, as Reed's view requires. Cf. *Eleg. in Maecen.* 1. 53-4, where *femina*, not *regina*, is chosen to point an attack on Cleopatra: note also *feminae* at *Ann.* xii 40. 5. Compare the royal Commagenians, who lost their kingdom but retained their royal titles: *ILS* 845 with R. D. Sullivan, *ANRW* II. 8 (1978), 796-7 and the literature he cites; cf. also *PIR*² C 1086 on Claudia Capitolina and the title *regina*, which she may have sported through marriage into this dynasty.