

weaken it, as the complexities of urban form's origins will be more accurately revealed.

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## Roman Alnwick: to be or not to be?

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Slater (2014) stands up as a public defender of alleged revealed truth, declaring my hypotheses about Alnwick's Roman origins (Cataldi, 2013b) to be 'false'. While the hypothesizing of a particular period for a town's foundation would in most contexts seem to be a fairly innocuous matter, Slater goes so far as to link it to more sensitive and general issues concerned with working towards a more unified theory of urban morphology (Slater, 2014, p. 80). This prompts me to return to my hypotheses.

Let me start by saying that the hypotheses are neither true nor false but, if anything, must be checked. Popper (1962) maintains that to be scientifically sound a theory has to be 'falsifiable': from its conjectures, one can deduce as consequences those elements capable of refuting it. Slater hastily dismissed our hypotheses about Alnwick's Roman origins when he first heard them (Cataldi *et al.*, 2004), as he candidly states at the beginning of his Viewpoint. He might at least have first taken into account the outcomes of research conducted on Italian territory (Cataldi, 1993, 2004, 2007; Cataldi *et al.*, 2000; Cataldi and Lavagnino, 1987).

As Slater correctly affirms, Britain is not Italy. However, it underwent a Romanization process that lasted almost 4 centuries: a rather long time span. After the appearance of the first urban forms and military settlements, it spread progressively, with material evidence of settlements generally decreasing from south to north, from Dover as far as the southern edges of the Scottish Highlands, to Gask Ridge, where recent excavations and research documented an impressive number of Roman lookout towers and fortresses (Woolliscroft and Hoffmann, 2006). It is an established fact that

Northumberland lies between Hadrian's and Antonine Pius's major Roman walls, and that Alnwick is located, as the crow flies, only 7-8 km from an important Roman road, which is still used today as a path, and is indicated on Ordnance Survey maps as the Devil's Causeway: a medieval name, that arouses mixed feelings of admiration and religious prejudice about Roman works.

Slater has evidently not fully understood the contents of Saverio Muratori's theory about ridgeways (Muratori, 1967), which postulates the utilization of these paths by early populations with minimal technology. These nomadic groups, not knowing how to make bridges, had to bypass waterways by following ridge paths. The mummified remains of a Copper Age hunter (Taraboi, 1998) were found at over 3000 m in Alto Adige, on the Alpine ridge. Subsequently, with the advent of permanent settlements, the ridges (especially those at high altitudes) ceased serving as migratory paths and became borders. In particular, the Romans tended to build roads, later famous as engineering works, at more accessible heights and in the plains.

The numerous, consistent Roman traces in Northumberland do not testify to Alnwick's Roman origin, but they dispose us to be cautious about precluding it. The metrics in Figure 5 in my Viewpoint are not 'proof' but converging 'clues'. It is plausible that the Alnwick area was geometrically divided in parallel and orthogonal lines, at distances of 2400 feet, like Roman *centuriae* (square land divisions) oriented *secundum caelum* (towards the cardinal points) and *secundum naturam* (to follow the arrangement of the place), as canonically envisaged by ancient land surveyors (Dilke, 1979).

The hereditary transmission of estates may have

been in many Romanized regions one of the main civil outcomes of Roman law, whose strategy notoriously and politically aimed at involving indigenous populations, through citizenship and property law. The latter, in particular, was initially handed down orally and subsequently embodied in documents, maps and land registers.

The application of the *forma quadrata* theory over Britain is only a working hypothesis. It is useful in obtaining an idea of the territorial strategy of the Romans. In its geometric layout, it seeks to simulate, on the basis of similarities with the practice adopted in Italian territory, the technical procedures of mapping needed to expedite territorial planning: procedures, in particular, that were necessary to create on the ground rectilinear road layouts of great precision. The *forma quadrata* hypotheses provide a reasonable explanation of the Roman structures that still exist. I realize that this perspective might not be familiar to those who are not architects and are not accustomed to using designs as a mental framework for space-time navigation.

Except for Peterson (1992), who confirms the important square module based on the Roman landing place of Dover, the publications cited by Slater precede the theory described in my Viewpoint. It goes without saying that further research must be conducted in other English regions, taking advantage, for example, of the Google Earth coverage that has become available since our 'reading' of Alnwick (Cataldi *et al.*, 2004). Our 'Alnwick' group was formed to pursue comparisons between M. R. G. Conzen's urban geographical school and our own approach following in the tradition of Muratori's architectural school. The aim was not to compete with the Conzenian school but to seek a better understanding 'from within' of mutually beneficial research methods and contribute towards building a shared vision of urban morphology. This very fortunate experience enabled us to publish the Italian translation of M. R. G. Conzen's book on Alnwick (Cataldi, 2013a; Cataldi *et al.*, 2012; Conzen, 1960).

Regarding the matter of Alnwick's place name, in my opinion Slater is defending an untenable view in suggesting the groundlessness of the derivation of the 'wick' suffix from the Latin *vicus*. Furthermore, he seems to be scoring an own goal when he states that

'there are up to eight places in Roman Britain named *Alauna*, all taking their names from the rivers on which they stand. The most urbanized of these settlements was at present-day Alcester in

Warwickshire, on the River Alne, which was succeeded by a small medieval borough (Rivet and Smith, 1979, pp. 243-6)' (Slater, 2014, p. 80).

This logically authorizes anybody to wonder why the same did not happen to Alnwick! Gelling (1978) also corroborates the continuity between Roman estates and medieval parishes to which the *wīchām* place name testifies in southern England.

But the most important aspect of our work on Alnwick concerns the central triangle at the core of the present town. Based on comparisons with Italian towns of Roman origin, we hypothesized that the three roads bypassed an earlier settlement. This is consistent with the Conzenian concept of fringe belts. The town's early medieval development can of course be explained without necessarily having to ascribe the central core to the Romans. In the absence of archaeological checks, the core could have antecedents in the pre-Roman or Anglian period, without conceptually changing our reading of Alnwick. Slater does not address this issue, evidently considering it secondary or at worst irrelevant.

After reading Slater's comments, I feel somewhat less optimistic about the prospects for the task of reconciling various approaches to urban morphology. This debate has underlined how difficult it is to overcome deeply ingrained standpoints.

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## Award of Honorary Life Membership of ISUF

Since its launch in 1994, ISUF has grown from a small group of academics and practitioners into a global organization with about 600 institutional and individual members. A number of long-standing members of ISUF have made very significant contributions to this development. The Council of ISUF has decided to recognize formally the particularly outstanding contributions of four of these members in building these institutional foundations: they are Jeremy Whitehand, Susan Whitehand, Michael Conzen and Gian Luigi Maffei. Their thoughtful leadership, remarkable professionalism and tremendous dedication have been invaluable in guiding the growth and change

of ISUF over the past two decades. To acknowledge their outstanding service, at its meeting in Porto, Portugal on 2 July 2014 the Council unanimously approved the award of Honorary Life Membership of ISUF to Jeremy Whitehand, Susan Whitehand, Michael Conzen and Gian Luigi Maffei. This Council decision was duly announced by the President of ISUF, Giancarlo Cataldi, at the General Meeting of ISUF in Porto on 6 July 2014.

Kai Gu  
Secretary-General, ISUF

## New urban configurations

The proceedings of the EAAE/ISUF International Conference on New Urban Configurations held in Delft, The Netherlands, 16-19 October 2012, have been published by IOS Press, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, ISBN 978-1-61499-365-0. Edited by R. Cavallo, S. Komossa, N. Marzot, M. Berghauser Pont and J. Kuijper, the papers are grouped into 5 themes:

1. Innovation in building typology

2. Infrastructure and the city
3. Complex urban projects
4. Green spaces: the city and the territory
5. Delta urbanism: living with water in the urban deltas

Keynote presentations by J. Castex, M. P. Conzen, H. Meyer, K. Kaan and M. Triggianese, and H. Engel are included.