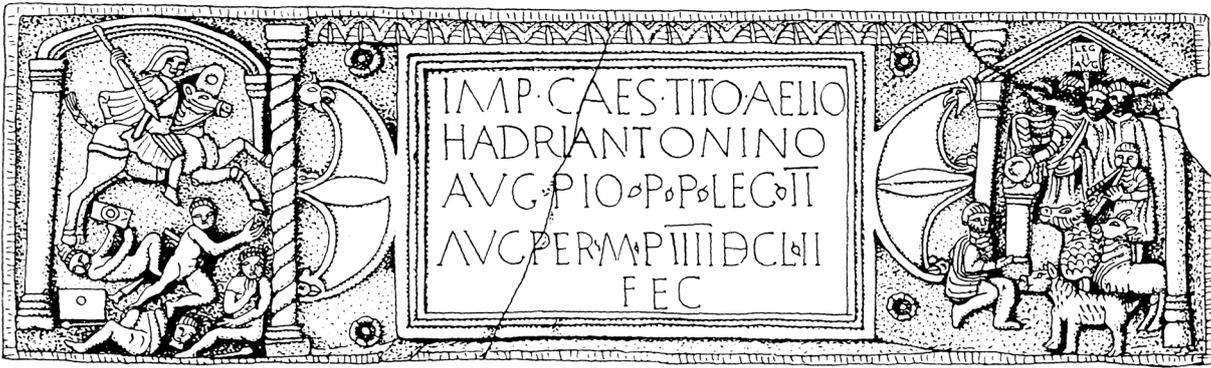


THE ROMANS AND THE CALEDONIANS

The Romans built the Antonine Wall to defend their empire against the 'Caledonians', the Roman name for the many tribes who lived in Scotland at the time. We know little about the Caledonians – apart from what the Romans themselves said about them.

Here are some sources of evidence which give us some idea of what the Romans thought of the Caledonians.



© Hunterian Museum, drawn by Margaret Scott.

1) This picture was carved on a stone placed on the Antonine Wall. Discuss what you can see. Who are the people shown?

What do you think this picture was for? Tick the option or options you think is most likely.

- It shows an event that really happened.
- It was a warning to the Caledonians to show what might happen to them.
- It was a way of making the Caledonians feel inferior to the Romans to try and frighten them off.
- Another reason: _____

What impression do you get of the Caledonians from this picture? Circle any words which describe them. Add any others of your own.

organised	disorganised	brave	cowardly	armed
skilled	cunning	fierce	pathetic	
stupid	strong	unarmed	courageous	weak

2) Here is an account by a Roman writer called Tacitus describing a time when the Caledonians attacked the Romans:

Chapter 25

The natives of Caledonia turned to armed resistance on a large scale ...They went so far as to storm some of our forts...There were cowards in the council who pleaded for a 'strategic retreat' behind the Forth... But just then [the Roman general] Agricola learned that the enemy was about to attack .. For fear that their superior numbers and knowledge of the country might enable them to surround him, he moved his own army forward in three divisions.

Chapter 26

As soon as the enemy got to know of this they suddenly changed their plans and massed for a night attack on the ninth legion. That seemed to them the weakest point. Striking panic into the sleeping camp, they cut down the sentries and broke in. The fight was already raging inside the camp when Agricola was warned by his scouts of the enemy's march. He followed close on their tracks, ordered the speediest of his cavalry and infantry to harass the assailants' rear, and finally made his whole force raise a shout. Dawn was now breaking, and the gleam of the legions' standards could be seen. Caught between two fires, the Britons were dismayed, while the men of the ninth took heart again. A grim struggle ensued in the narrow gateways. At last the enemy were routed by the efforts of the two armies. Had not marshes and woods covered the enemy's retreat, that victory would have ended the war.

From: The Agricola, chapters 25 and 26, Tacitus.

What impression do you get of the Caledonians from this account? Circle any words which describe them. Add any others of your own.

organised	disorganised	brave	cowardly	armed
skilled	cunning	fierce	pathetic	
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3) In 1933 a pot with nearly 2,000 Roman coins was found near Falkirk. Historians think this was probably a bribe, or several bribes, paid out to a powerful Caledonian leader by the Romans, perhaps to stop them attacking.



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Discuss what this tells us about how the Romans viewed the Caledonians. **Tick the answer you think is true.**

- It would be hard and costly for the Romans to defeat the Caledonians, so it was easier to pay them off.
- The Romans couldn't be bothered to fight the Caledonians, so it was easier to give them money instead.
- The Romans were frightened of the Caledonians, who demanded money or else they would attack.
- Another reason:

Find out more:

Carry out your own research to find out more about the Caledonian tribes and how they lived.