For Flavian rulers, the relationship between emperor and the acquisition of empire was particularly strong: Vespasian’s nomination depended upon his military reputation and actual success in Judaea (Suet. Vesp. 6); similarly much of Titus’ popularity was accrued during his military service in Britain, Germany and Judaea, while Domitian is represented as an emperor desperately trying to extend the bounds of empire (Suet. Dom. 2.1, 6.1). But while it was the much-derided victory in Germany that Domitian chose to celebrate and attach to his own name, the greatest territorial expansion and scope for rhetorical flourish occurred across the Ocean in Britain.

Britain was the most northerly point ever conquered by Rome and it took over a hundred years to subjugate the island: from Caesar’s initial skirmishes with the Britons in 54 BCE, to the defeat of the Caledonians in 84 CE by the Roman general, Agricola. During this period, Roman interest in geography and graphic representations of the world exploded: the first known Roman map of the world was planned by Iulius Caesar; the project was later researched by Agrippa and a map was set up in the Porticus Vipsania. Another Augustan project, the Forma Urbis, which mapped the city of Rome, was updated in the reign of Vespasian and placed in the library of Vespasian’s own Temple of Peace. It seems reasonable that the temple housed a second library containing a similarly updated map of the world. Certainly the presence of the city map indicates that the

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4 Braund (1996) 149 points out that, by 77 CE, ‘Caledonia had become the objective, the remaining field for excellence’.
6 As noted by Dudley (1967) 131. For the probable layout of the Temple and libraries, see Richardson (1992) 287.
Augustan interest in the control of space through mapping\(^7\) was still being pursued in the Flavian era. The geographical display of empire would highlight the status of Britain—often described as *ultima*—at the very edge of the *orbis terrarum*\(^8\).

To emphasise its remoteness, Britain was often referred to as ‘Caledonia’, technically the northern part of Britain; or, even more often, it was called ‘Thule’.\(^9\) Thule was a mystery place off the north coast of Caledonia—definitely *not* in the *orbis terrarum*: supposedly it sported the midnight sun, probably no humans, but many prodigies (*miracula*; Serv. 1.30). Roman geographers disputed its existence\(^10\) and commentators are still wondering about Thule’s identity.\(^11\) For the Romans ‘Thule’ became a mythical ‘point beyond’ all else, a way of describing the most remote locus.\(^12\) The elision of Britain and Thule was more than a convenient metrical variant for Roman poets—it also encapsulated the concept that Britain was fabulously remote, mystically unreal and beyond the bounds of knowledge. It

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\(^7\) See Nicolet (1991) esp. 95–122.

\(^8\) Britannia as a far off place is standard as early as the late republic: see Catull. 11.11: *ultimosque Britannos* (*the most remote Britons*); Catull. 29.4: *ultima Britannia* (*remotest Britain*); Diodorus Siculus (5.21.2; cf. 5.24.2–3) cites Britain as the one region never invaded by Greek heroes: ἄφεσι δὲ τὸ μὲν παλαιὸν ἄνευμικτος ἐξέντερον ἕξινακες δυνάμεσιν ὅπερ γὰρ Διόνυσον οὖθ᾽ ἤρεκλέα παρελθόμενον οὔπερ τῶν ἄλλων ἡμῶν ἐπρατησμένον ἐπ᾽ ὀψῆ προτέρη ἐν ancient times this place was not visited by foreign armies; for tradition tells us that neither Dionysos nor Herakles nor any other hero made a campaign against it’); Hor. *Carm.* 1.35.29–30: *in ultimos orbis Britannos* (*against the Britons, the most remote of the earth*); Hor. *Carm.* 4.14.47–8: *remotis ... Britannis* (*the distant Britons*); Virg. *Ecl.* 1.66: *toto diuisos orbe Britannos* (*the Britons, cut off from the whole world*); Martial (11.3.5) implies that Britain is the most remote place with an awareness of his poetry: *dicitur et nostros cantare Britannia versus* (*even Britain is said to sing our lines*).


\(^10\) A Greek traveller, Pytheas (c. 200 BCE), claimed it was an island near a solid ice sea—but he is ridiculed by Strabo (1.4.2–4). Mela records Thule as the land of the midnight sun (3.57), while Pliny simply reports it as the most remote island beyond Britain (*HN* 4.104).

\(^11\) Ogilvie and Richmond (1967) 172 argue for a shifting identity: the name ‘Thule’ probably refers to Shetland for Tacitus, but to Iceland in earlier writers.

\(^12\) As discussed by Romm (1992) 157, Thule had a long history of being ‘perceived but not approachable’. Polybius even claimed that Thule was in an area where distinctions of land, sea and air no longer existed but that all combined so that it was ‘like a jellyfish’ (*τὸ πλαύμονον ἕοικός*), which made access impossible (34.5.2–4).