CHAPTER 6

*Inungi delectus*—The Recruitment of Britons in the Roman Army during the Conquest: The Evidence from Dorset

*Christopher Sparey-Green*

Introduction

With the annexation of south-east Britain, the establishment of new client kingdoms and the move by Roman forces into the central lowlands, Claudius had followed in the footsteps of Julius Caesar and resolved a century of failed expeditions and inconclusive diplomacy. While only the preliminary to conquest, Claudius had overseen the re-establishment of a Roman presence in the islands beyond the Ocean and the formation of a province which, under his successor, Nero, came to disaster and near abandonment. Thereafter, the campaigning forces moved north and into lowland Scotland, the conquest effectively ending with Domitian’s policy in the aftermath of the battle of *Mons Graupius*.

Without elaborating on the progress of these campaigns, this paper will outline evidence for one process in the aftermath of the defeat of the British forces, namely the recruitment and training of the Britons into auxiliary units. As elsewhere in Western Europe, natives were trained as military forces for campaigns out of their home regions. Such a policy not only provided specialist auxiliary troops, such as light infantry or cavalry to complement the legions,

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1 The conquest of Britain has most recently been described by Todd (2004) and Birley (2008) who both rightly see the process of invasion as spanning the whole period between Caesar and Claudius. Sauer (2005) also contains a detailed discussion of operations in south Britain in the early phases of the later campaign up to the time of the Boudican revolt.
but was also a more effective means of preventing guerrilla action or revolt and promoting the Romanisation of new territories.2

Since the 1950s the Roman campaign in south-west Britain, in the period preceding the Boudican revolt, has been outlined on the basis of the limited historical references in Suetonius and Tacitus, supported by the limited number of inscriptions and the investigation of the archaeological traces of early Roman military activity by Webster.3 Over the following decades our view of the campaign in the south-west has developed with the recognition of the legionary base at Exeter, the probable half-legion base at Lake Farm near Wimborne in East Dorset and a series of garrison forts elsewhere in the region.4 Most recently the identification of a presumed defended supply base on the Exe south of Exeter provides a parallel for the evidence from Poole and Corfe Mullen, south of Lake Farm.5

The evidence for the recruitment of native Britons from this lowland zone has been discussed before in connection with units operating in northern Britain before transference to the continent.6 In this paper the few literary references and the limited epigraphic evidence will be summarized, followed by a consideration of the previous discussion of the perceived stylistic links in the character of weaponry, harness, cavalry equipment, and other metalwork found on sites in southern Britain, the northern frontier, and, in one case, on the continent. The major focus here is on early military sites in Dorset and neighbouring areas which, it is suggested, were not simply garrison forts, but also training camps; other archaeological finds may equally reflect this activity.

The Documentary Evidence

The relationship of the invading forces to the native defenders involved more than the defeat and pacification of tribal peoples. In the aftermath of the

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2 For the recruitment of Britons into the army, see Dobson & Mann (1973); on auxiliary forces in Britain (Holder 1982, 109–29) and, most recently, Haynes (2013, 126–7).
3 Webster (1960a).
4 For Exeter see Henderson (1988). The Devon sites are summarized in Griffith (1984) and later issues of the Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society. For Hod Hill see Richmond (1968), for Waddon Hill Webster (1979); for an overview of the early military situation in Dorset see Field (1992).
5 For the former St. Loye’s College site see Booth (2011, 384–6). The Lake Gates site unfortunately remains unpublished, but see Field (1992, 32–44). The most recent work at Poole identified Late Iron Age and early Roman occupation and two massive defensive ditches crossing the southern peninsula: Coles & Pine (2009).
6 See note 2.