

## BONA (Inverness-shire), BOAR CARVINGS and a ROMAN LEGION

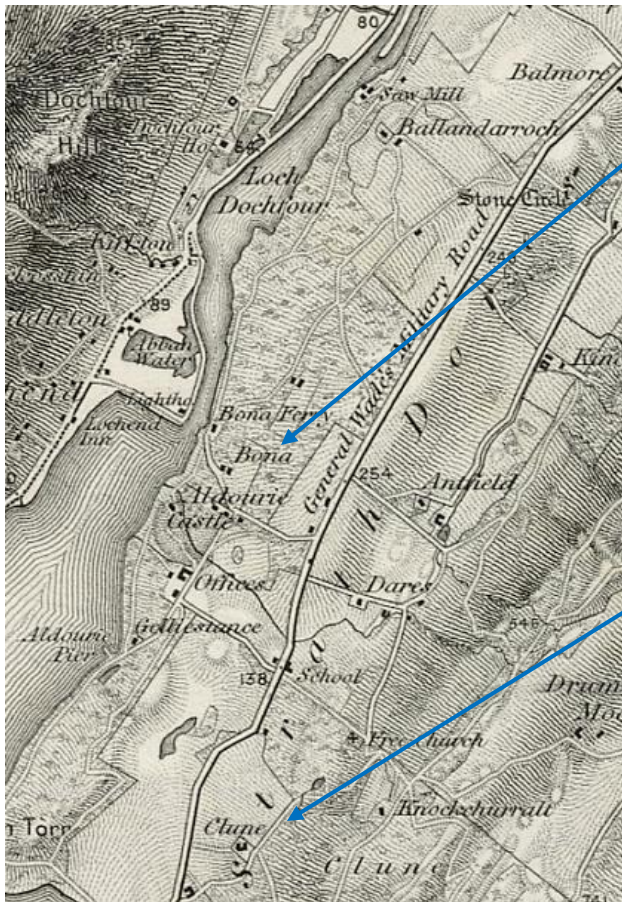
Bona, at the north-east end of Loch Ness, has a few houses and is near a relatively modern castle - all well hidden from roads but very visible from cruise boats. There was a ferry at this point where the River Ness joins the end of Loch Ness - remains of piers are still visible. Its importance goes back much further than being the start point of the eastern section of the Caledonian Canal to Inverness from the early 1800s or, prospectively, St Columba sailing by in 565 CE. From my research into the name "Bona" and carvings on nearby Pictish Stones it seems that Bona may have a connection back to a Roman Legion.



There are several possible derivations for "Bona" including *Bona Dea* (a goddess in ancient Roman religion), the Latin word *bona* meaning good, Mount Bona in South Alaska and the seaport of Annaba in Algeria. Of these the first three seem unlikely contenders. *Bona Dea's* cult appears to have arrived in Rome some time during the early or middle Republic (from around 500 to 133 BCE) - well before the period of Roman Legions. As a word, *bona* usually does not stand alone - for example seen as *bona fide* i.e. in good faith, genuine, legitimate. Mount Bona was given that name in 1897 by an Italian explorer, Prince Luigi Amedeo, who named it after his racing yacht - well after the Roman Empire. However, the present day seaport of Annaba in Algeria has a context that may well fit.

Encyclopaedia Britannica (1911) shows Bona (Arabic *Annaba*) identified with the Algerian seaport of *Hippo Regius* or *Ubbo*. Seemingly when it became a Roman colonia the city name was latinised to Hippo from the original Punic name *Ūbôn* or *Ubbo* meaning harbour. Perhaps the key to a connection between Bona, Scotland and Bona, Algeria lies in the deployment of Roman auxiliary forces from North Africa - but to explore that link the next step is interpreting the significance of carvings of boars on Pictish Stones.

Amongst the range of what we know as Pictish Standing Stones, only two have incised carvings of boars – both originally stood near to Bona. One was located at Clune Farm, Dores and the other at Knocknagael, Essich.



Bona is here on the south bank of Loch Dochfour at the eastern entrance to Loch Ness.

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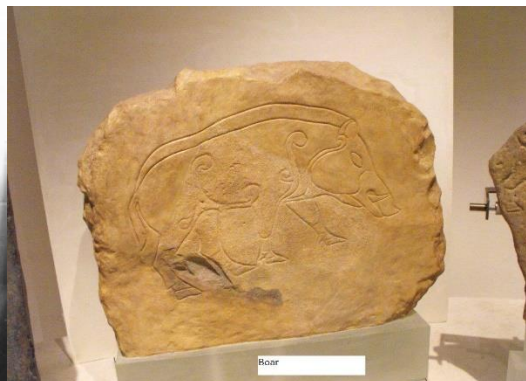
Just over a mile away from Bona is the original location of the Clune Farm, Dores Pictish Stone with an incised boar carving; nearer to Inverness, the Knocknagael Boar Stone stood.

The Clune Farm stone has no other carvings on it – just the boar.

The surviving fragment of the Clune Farm Stone, originally at NH 6057 3542, was near a chambered cairn, hut circles and field systems. It is in the National Museum of Scotland (NMS), Edinburgh with a reconstructed full boar copy. Photos courtesy of NMS.



Dores (Clune Farm) Stone - fragment ↑



and reconstructed full boar copy ↑





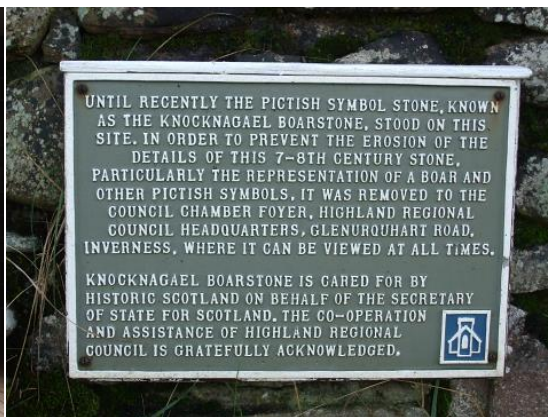
Around 5 miles north-east of Bona, the Knocknagael Boar Stone once stood at a road junction beyond Lochardil, Inverness that is marked by the sign shown below. It has one other carving– a so-called “mirror case”.

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Originally located at NH 6567 4134 near a stone circle, the Knocknagael Boar Stone is now housed in the foyer of the Highland Council, Inverness.



Knocknagael Stone - indoors ↑



where it stood near Essich, Inverness ↑

In the time of the Roman Empire the Boar was the emblem of the Twentieth Legion. It has several connections with Caledonia.

The Twentieth Legion built the base at Inchtuthil (82/83 CE) as part of Agricola's campaign, it was involved with the construction of Hadrian's Wall which began in 122 and the Antonine Wall (initially built between 142 and about 154). In 208 the Twentieth reappears when Septimius Severus initiated repairs to the Antonine Wall for his Caledonia campaign.



X.FR567 - Cappuck

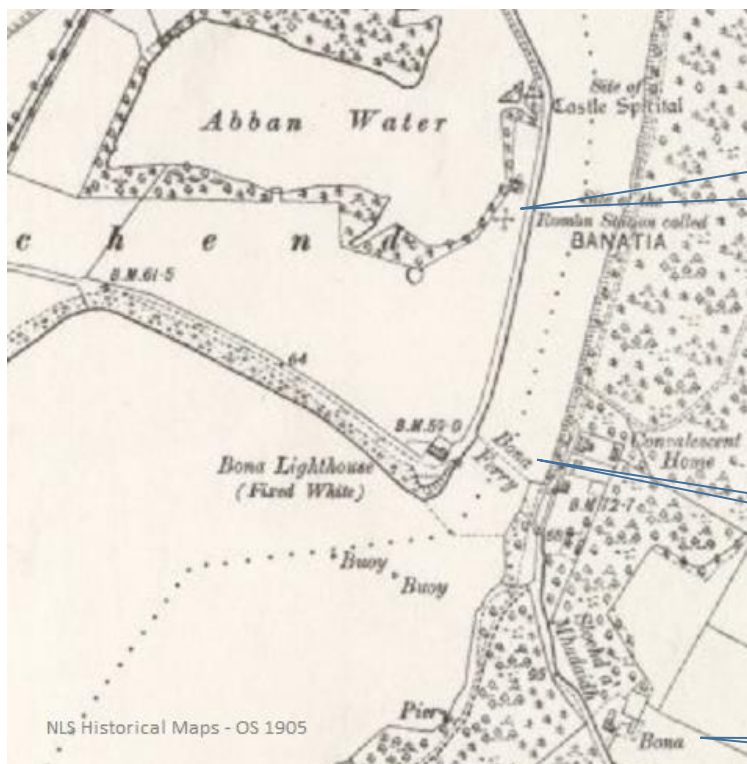
Archaeological evidence of the Twentieth Legion complete with a carving of its emblem - a Boar - can be seen on this dedication slab which dates to the Antonine period. Named the Cappuck Stone, it was found in 1886 near Jedburgh, with the text "*Twentieth Legion, Valeria Victrix, built (this)*".

As well as locations by the Antonine wall, Roman establishments of various sizes were built during Agricola and Severan campaigns in what is now North East Scotland. Larger camps were at Kintore, Muiryfold, Ythan Wells and Durno; others are of less determinate periods.

In Bradshaw's Handbook of 1863 there is mention of "Dochfour, seat of E. Baillie, Esq., near Dochfour Loch, and the Roman station of *Bonatrie*, not far from Loch Ness". This was the first reference I had seen to any Roman establishment in this location, and research has not shown up a place named Bonatrie - perhaps it is a misprint of Bona or Bona Ferry.

In a paper – "North Scotland's Roman Heritage" - TC (Cedric) Bell states he has identified "a number of fortlets alongside the south bank of the eastern entrance to Loch Ness with specific locations at NH6047-3786 by a track north of Aldourie castle and NH 6058-3847 on a ridge above a track (the route of a possible Roman road with visible stonework)".

Alister Chisholm of the South Loch Ness Heritage Group let me know in May 2020 that he had noticed the site of a Roman station called Banatia marked near Bona on an Ordnance Survey map prepared in 1902 and published in 1905. This is on the opposite side of the River Ness / Caledonian Canal to Bona. Perhaps there was a presence on both sides of the water - understandable for operating a crossing and controlling movements through it, perhaps with Abban Water, just beyond the Lochend promontory, being a harbour.



"Site of the Roman station called BANATIA" - marked with a cross symbol east of Abban Water

Bona Ferry

Bona

NLS Historical Maps - OS 1905

Having trawled through the maps accessible from the National Library of Scotland, so far only the 1875 and 1905 versions of OS maps show Banatia. However, the Highland Historical Environment Record entry MHG 3537 records that “On the flat gravelly peninsula which divides Loch Ness from Loch Dochfour, are traces of a small Roman encampment. It is an oblong square, rounded at the corners, and encircled by ramparts of earth, and an irregular ditch, from twenty to forty feet wide.” and that “The Roman camp is said to have been in a good state of preservation until the Caledonian Canal was deepened, when the ditch surrounding it was filled in, and the ground where the camp stood cultivated.”

A choice of names - Bona, Bonatrie and Banatia - seems to have appeared; maybe they all refer to the one place, perhaps there is more than one. A trace back to a source for the Bona name is arguably in Algeria; nothing has been found for Banatia but Banat (from a Wikipedia entry) is in an historical and geographical region straddling between Central and Eastern Europe which came under Roman rule around 102 CE. It was in the Pannonia basin bordered by the Danube, had important Roman settlements and would, most likely (as with other acquired territories) have provided auxiliaries for the Legions. It was and is a mineral rich area. Nowadays - I cannot find information dating to 2000 years ago - there is mineral mining in Algeria, particularly iron ore. Cedric Bell has suggested there was iron ore extraction by the Romans near Fort Augustus and that the ore would have been moved out by ship towards Inverness. Two aspects spring to mind - firstly to extract minerals from that area knowledge would have had to have been brought in (no different to American expertise in helping to develop the North Sea oil industry) and secondly secure transport routes would have been required. This is no different to Portus Lemanis (Lympne on modern maps) serving the Weald of Kent industrial area known for iron mining and smelting. Overall the Roman invasion was most likely to have had a commercial purpose.

So the names of both Bona and Banatia at the north east end of Loch Ness could have been given to Roman establishments based on Bona, Algeria (a sea port whose name in Punic is Ubbo which means harbour) and from the mineral rich Banat area in Central / Eastern Europe for Banatia. Ptolemy (known for his Geographia) died around 170 CE and supposedly had Banatia included on a map of Caledonia. If the names of these locations came to the map makers from Roman military intelligence then that ties in, time-wise, with their building the Antonine wall from 142 and the senatorial province of Africa Proconsularis of East Algeria, Tunisia and Tripolitania (shown on a 125 CE map) being well established and the potential source of auxiliaries. Prospectively this Roman activity around Bona could be from the mid-second century CE.

Considering the potential reasons for the names Bona and Banatia and the boar carvings perhaps the Stones were incised specifically by people associated with the Roman Twentieth Legion. If so then the connection has significant historical impact:-

- adding another location for the presence of the Twentieth Legion therefore
- reinforcing that there was a Roman military presence further north in Scotland (Caledonia) than is generally regarded,
- prompting the removal of the Boar as a “symbol” from the lists of Pictish Symbol Stones – arguably it represents a Roman Legion emblem and
- challenging the dating of the Knocknagael Boar Stone (shown as 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century on the Historic Scotland sign shown above).

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