

Duro- in early place names

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This is an experiment in writing a serious academic article without conventional references, relying entirely on web hyperlinks. It has been published in Academia Letters, a new and experimental online journal, whose system for accepting submissions seems to be so far geared up only for plain text, and makes a mess of tables, bookmarks, and Greek letters. This PDF file should appear correctly formatted on most screens and print-outs.

More than 50 geographical names that have survived from the Roman Empire contain an element *Duro-* or *-durum*. What did it mean?

This element probably descended from proto-Indo-European **dhwer-*, which led to the English word door, plus Welsh *dôr*, Latin *forum*, Greek *θύρα*, and Russian *двор*. “Gaulish” *Doro* was translated with Latin *Osteo* ‘entrance’ by [Endlicher's Glossary](#).

Names containing *-durum* as a second element occurred mainly in and around France ([Lacroix](#), 2005:243-246, or see [here](#)). [Delamarre](#) (2017 chapter 4) translated it as ‘*domaine, marché, forum*’, while suggesting that most Celtic place names were built around the name of a proprietor, whether chieftain, deity, or tribe. That idea does not fit place-names beginning with *Duro-*, which occurred mainly in the east of Britain or in Germanic areas on the Continent.

My own preference of translating *Duro-* as ‘crossing’ (and related to, or influenced by, Dutch *door* and German *durch* ‘through’) may also be less than ideal: it suggests that name elements associated with *Duro-* mostly refer to a river or its banks. *Duro[a]vernum* (Canterbury) and *Duroliponte* (Cambridge) exemplify the issues. Both towns are on rivers, but their most distinctive geographical feature is to be nodes from which many Roman roads radiated. They were transport hubs, by land more than by water. Perhaps the best description is the geographers’ term Central Place, somewhere that provides services to a surrounding area.

Name elements that combined with *Duro-* and *-durum* could in principle arise top-down, from a distinct founder, or bottom-up, as a mundane description of local life. Linguistics alone offers no clear answer, so I have pragmatically surveyed the available data, and tabulate here the best available spellings and locations for 57 ancient names that are verifiably attested. To be included, a name must be Roman, i.e. up to about AD 700, so Gregory of Tours and the Ravenna Cosmography are in, but hypothetical spellings reconstructed from medieval forms are out. This list has added substantially to the 39 names in [Rivet](#) (1980:14) while eliminating some bad guesses.

Almost every name raises awkward questions about its observed spelling(s), history, location, meaning, etc. Instead of article-length discussions of specific elements (such as *lav-/lev-*, *nov-/nav-*, and *briv-/brov-*, which are often associated with river valleys), this article has copious hyperlinks leading towards background information. The column headed “Elements” in the table below offers some guesses for etymologies and meanings, which should be regarded as a stimulus to polite debate, not to scornful one-upmanship.

What leaps out of the data is the sheer diversity of name elements associated with *Duro-* and *-durum*. All previously suggested explanations (fort, market, tribal centre, river crossing, etc) can fit at least some of these places, but the only characteristic that seems nearly universal was to be a transport hub. This shows up strikingly in 3D maps (such as in Google Earth) of mountainous areas, where our places tend to sit on the flat bottoms of bowls surrounded by valleys. Generally, 4 to 8 travel routes radiated, once rivers are included as well as roads. A few places have only one recognised Roman road, but any rest stop there was presumably fed by minor roads.

This conclusion does not help to pin down names whose locations are currently known only approximately (such as [Durolavii](#)), but it focusses attention on sociological questions. What caused particular names to catch on? When did Central Places get named with *Duro-* or *-durum* rather than *Venta*, *Coria*, [Bann](#), *-dunum*, or *-magus*? How much political or administrative control of a surrounding area did they have?

Duro- names: 17 in Britain and 8 on the Continent, plus one “tribe”.

Roman name	Modern place	River	Elements	Comments
Durobrisin	Scole	Waveney	<i>*bhreia-</i> ‘to cut’	
Durobrivae	Chesterton	Nene	<i>*briva</i>	near Peterborough
Durobrivae	Rochester	Medway	<i>*briva</i>	
Durocibrivis	Dunstable	(none)	<i>*briva</i>	on watershed
Durocornovium	Nythe Farm	Cole	<i>*cor-</i> + <i>navis</i>	near Swindon

Durolevi	Halesworth	Blyth	*lav-	East Anglia harbour
Durolevum	Ospringe	Westbrook	*lav-	levee or lavant?
Duroliponte	Cambridge	Cam	*leikw-+*onts 'leaving'	Lepontii ?=migrants
Durolitum	Chigwell	Roding	litus 'river bank'	
*Duronovaria	Dorchester	Frome	*navis + *ar-	not *durnos 'fist'
Duro[al]vernum	Canterbury	Stour	island?	not *werna 'swamp'
Duroviquito	Baylham Farm	Gipping	*weagh- 'to move'?	upstream from Ipswich
Duriarno	Nanstallon	Camel	*arna	near Boscarne
Durcinate	Stratford St Mary	Stour	cunette?	East Anglia river crossing
Purocoronavis	Bude	Neet	*cor-+*navis	D/P confusion?
Bdora	Sandy Wath	Solway	Bi-duro??	estuary fords
Δουροτριγες	people in Dorset	Yeo	drag/trek?	
Duretia	Rieux,F	Vilaine	rivus 'stream'	marshland bridge TP
Durocatalaunos	Châlons,F	Marne	Catu+Alauna	major road junction
Durocortorum	Reims,F	Marne	cortex?	ring of hills
Duroicorequm	Domqueur,F	dried up	*ico-+riqo 'to wet'	Roman stone bridge
Duronum	Etroeungt ,F	> Helpe	onno 'river'	Nervian AI&TP
Durocassium	Dreux,F	Blaise>Eure	cassus 'hollow'	Durocasses people
Durotincum	Villar d'Arêne ,F	(streams)	thing	in Alps TP
Durostorum	Silistra ,BG	Danube	Ister?	well attested

-durum names: One in Britain and 26 on the Continent.

Roman name	Modern place	River	Elements	Comments
Lactodoro	Towcester,GB	Tove	laxo 'widen'	
Augustodurum	Bayeux,F	Aure	Augustus	TP
Autessiodurum	Auxerre,F	Yonne	Autricus?	inscription people
Βαταουδοουρον	Nijmegen,NL	Waal	island	later Noviomagi TP
Βοιοδοουρον	Passau-Innstadt,D	Inn/Danube	Boii	Ptolemy, TP&AI
Breviodurum	Brionne,F	Risle	*briva	TP&AI crossroads
Brivodurum	Briare,F	Loire	*briva	
Divodurum	Metz ,F	Moselle	Deva?	
Εβοδοουρον	Bludenz?,A	Ill	epi?	?= eborodunon
Epomanduodurum	Mandeure ,F	Doubs	horses	TP&AI , non-fortified
Ernodurum	Saint-Ambroix ,F	Arnon	arna	TP
Γανοδοουρον	Solothurn ?,CH	Aare	gann , *ghengh-	Ptolemy
Γαυαυοδοουρον	St. Pölten ,A	Traisen	*ger-+*ap-	Or Gap- , Ptolemy
Ibliodurum	Ville-sur-Yron,F	Yron	sparrow-hawk?	Belgica AI
Iciodorum	Issoire ,F	Allier	ico?	Gregory of Tours
Ictodurum	La Batie Neuve ,F	(streams)	*φικτις?	via Domitia in Alps
Marcodurum	Düren,D	Roer	*markos 'horse'	Tacitus Histories 4,28
Nemptudorum	Nanterre ,F	Seine	nemeton	Gregory, vico Nemptudoro
Octodurus	Martigny ,CH	Rhone	Octo	multi-road junction
Οκτοδοουρον	Landeck ,A	Inn+Sanna	Octo	Ptolemy
Salodurum	Solothurn ,CH	Aare	salt	Roman road station
Sorviodurum	Straubing,D	Danube	sorbeo 'to suck'	alluvial plain
Teudorum	Tüddern ,D	Maas	*beudō 'people'	AI Theudorum , NL border
Velatudoro	Vellerot-lès-Belvoir ,F	Doubs	velatus 'hidden'	AI
Venaxamodurum	Neuburg ,D	Danube	vena+Axium	ND Danube 2 channels
*Vitudurum	Winterthur ,CH	Töss	ελτις 'wheel-rim'	crossroads in Alps

Excluded

Too late: [Balodurum](#) (Balleure), [Brioderus](#) (Bridore), [Diodurum](#) (?), [Dunodurum](#) (Mer), [Duromannos](#),

*[Isarnodurum](#), [Ternoderum](#) ([Tonnère](#)), [Albioderus](#) (Augers-en-Brie).

Poorly supported: [BPENOΔQP](#) (?Bern), [Lindiduro](#) (Lindern), [Liciodurum](#) (Lissoir), [*Pelagiodurum](#) (Pleurs),

[Rigodurum](#) ([Rheder](#)), [Melodurum](#) ([Melun](#), ?= [Melodunum](#)), [Valciodurum](#) (Waulsort), [Vicedurum](#), [Volodurum](#).

Confusions

[Mutudurei](#) people, [Tarvodurum](#), and [Ocelo duri](#) (Zamora) reference the river Duero, one of 13 anciently *Duria* ([Villar](#), 2010).

[Dura-Europos](#) beside the Euphrates probably contained Semitic root [dur](#) 'to dwell'.

[Ilduro](#) contained Iberian-language [iltur](#) 'city'.

Βραγοδουρον probably contains miscopied -δουρον, judging by [Briqobanne](#) = [Hüfingen](#) on river Breg.

[Dur](#) 'iron', a Welsh loan from Latin *durus* 'hard', is claimed to be in tribal names [Durotrages](#) and [Durocasses](#), essentially reviving the bad old translation of 'fort' for *Duro-*.

Bookmarks

AI = Antonine Itinerary ([Cuntz](#)).

Arna, Sanskrit for 'river', resembles the [Arno](#) in Italy, Arnon in Jordan, and Erne in Ireland.

Cor-, from [*\(s\)ker-](#) 'to bend', fits many bendy rivers.

Horse might fit [*epo-](#) (compare [ἔπος](#)) plus [*mandu-](#) (compare mane), or else [epi](#) 'above, over' plus [mando](#) 'command'.

Island: [*awjō](#) 'river island' may be in the [Batavi](#) people.

Ico-: meaning [uncertain](#), possibly 'water', as in [Icauna](#), or 'peak', or 'increase' as in [eke](#), or like [vicus](#) 'trading place' with Greek-style loss of W sound.

ND = *Notitia Dignitatum*.

Octo- in names may signify 'eight', 'cold', 'outside', or 'eye'.

Salt was traded along the Aare, judging by Roman inscriptions vico [SALOD](#) and [ALODURENSES](#) and the medieval market downstream at Büren.

Stor-: Ptolemy Δουροστορον, TP *Durostero*, AI [Dorostoro](#), ND *Durostoro*, Codex Theodosianus [Dorostori](#), etc.

Thing: Germanic for 'popular assembly' may fit *Durotincum*, on Roman road through the Alps, and also [DUROTINCIO](#) on inscription near Limoges.

TP = [Tabula Peutinger](#), a Roman map.