WHAT CAN A GIANT ROMAN LEG TELL US ABOUT SCOTLAND?



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

A large bronze leg found in a Scottish bog more than 200 years ago is changing ideas about Roman rule in Scotland. For many years, historians thought Scottish tribes had stolen the leg from a Roman statue in York and carried it north. New research suggests it was part of a huge statue of the emperor Antoninus Pius, placed near Hawick around AD 140 after Roman armies captured parts of southern Scotland. The statue may have shown the emperor riding a horse and was probably meant to impress local Iron Age communities. The leg is now the centrepiece of a major exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Other objects include a decorated Roman bowl, painted altars from a temple to Mithras and the skeleton of a carefully buried horse. The exhibition suggests Roman power reached farther into Scotland than historians once believed.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

This discovery shows that history can change when old objects are studied in new ways. The statue was not simply a piece of Roman art. It was also a political message, showing local people the power and wealth of an empire. The Romans changed Scottish communities, but those communities also adapted Roman ideas for their own purposes.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“Why would the Romans place a huge statue in conquered Scotland?”

Source: The Guardian

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/nov/12/bronze-leg-scottish-bog-roman-occupation-exhibit