

A Roman Altar from Westerwood on the Antonine Wall

by R. P. Wright

The altar here illustrated (Pl. 23a) was found³ in ploughing in the spring of 1963 perhaps within, or more likely just to the west of, the fort of Westerwood on the Antonine Wall. The precise spot could not be determined, but as the altar was unofficial it is more likely to have lain outside the area of the fort. It was dragged to the boundary of the field, where it was recognised two days later by Master James Walker and was transferred to Dollar Park Museum.

The altar⁴ is of buff sandstone, 10 in. wide by 25 in. high by 9½ in. thick, and has a rosette with recessed centre in place of the focus. The stone has several plough-scores on the back and right side, and was slightly chipped when being hauled off the field, fortunately without any damage to the inscription. Much of the lettering was at first obscured by a dark and apparently ferrous concretion, but after some weeks of slow drying this could be brushed off, leaving a slight reddish stain. The inscription reads:

SILVANIS [ET] | QUADRVIS CA[E] | LESTIB·SACR | VIBIA PACATA | FL·VERECV[ND]I |
O LEG·VI·VIC | CUM SVIS | V·S·L·M

Silvanis et Quadr(i)vis Caelestib(us) sacr(um) Vibia Pacata Fl(avi) Verecundi (uxor) c(enturionis) leg(ionis) VI Vic(tricis) cum suis v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)

'Sacred to the Silvanae Quadriviae Caelestes: Vibia Pacata, wife of Flavius Verecundus, centurion of the Sixth Legion Victrix, with her family willingly and deservedly fulfilled her vow.'

Dedications expressed to Silvanus in the singular are fairly common in Britain,⁵ as in other provinces. Three have occurred on the Antonine Wall, at Bar Hill,⁶ Auchendavy⁷ and Cadder.⁸ The deity is in the singular and the dedicators appear to be soldiers. Two inscriptions from the Continent may perhaps be set beside them. One at Cologne⁹ was erected to the Deae Malvisiae and Silvanus by Aurelius Verecundus, centurion of a *numerus Britonnum*, and another at Deutz¹⁰ by a veteran of another such unit.

The Quadriviae¹¹ presided over the junction of four roads but are much less widespread than

¹ *ibid.*, 214

² *ibid.*, xcvi (1962-3), 152.

³ It is regretted that various circumstances have delayed this report. Miss D. Hunter kindly gave details of the site and made the altar available for study and contributed some of the reference material incorporated here. Dr K. A. Steer furnished details of the discovery, and provided a photograph which has been reproduced here by the courtesy of the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments, Scotland.

⁴ Wright, *JRS*, LIV (1964), 178, Pl. XVI, 1.

⁵ Over twenty instances, mainly in the north. See *JRS*, xxxvi (1946), 147: Richmond and Wright, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, xxxvii (1948),

112; Wright, *Durham University Journal*, XL (1948), 56.

⁶ *RIB*, 2167.

⁷ *RIB*, 2178.

⁸ *RIB*, 2187.

⁹ *CIL*, XIII, 8208 (*ILS*, 4762).

¹⁰ *CIL*, XIII, 8492 (*ILS*, 4630). The text is damaged but includes Hercules Magusanus, Silvanus, Genius Loci, Mercurius and 'all other gods and goddesses'.

¹¹ Although Huebner conjectured QVADRIVIAE on an altar from Chester-le-Street (*CIL*, VII, 454, *addit.* p. 309) the more likely solution advanced in *RIB*, 1048 is that the obscure letters conceal the dedicator's outlandish name.

the Triviae or Biviae, guardians of triple or double junctions, with whose dedications they are sometimes linked. At Mainz¹ there is a dedication 'Lares Competales sive Quadriviae'. They are distributed mainly in the north, particularly in the German provinces, but in Upper Pannonia there is an unusual group² of shrines and altars in which they are linked with Silvanus. Otherwise their associations are with the other deities of the cross-roads, apart from one³ with Genius Loci and one⁴ with a local goddess, Abnoba.

When the Silvan(ae?) were linked with the Quadriviae it is on the face of it likely that the name should be expanded in the feminine plural, and this is certainly the case on four dedications⁵ at Campona, Carnuntum and Aquincum (two instances, one with sculptured figures). On *CIL*, III 10460 the text Sil(vano) et Silvanis is surmounted by a sculpture of Silvanus with a dog and a triad of Silvanae. There are sculptured nymphs on another of the altars, and Klotz⁶ claims that Silvanus 'is often associated with Nymphs, who are called Silvanae in Illyria'. Domaszewski states⁷ that the Greeks on the Dalmatian coast identified Silvanus with Pan and the Nymphs.

Consideration is also needed of a third feature, the epithet Caelestibus. This was given to several deities⁸ besides Juno Caelestis of Carthage, and occurs on an altar⁹ at Corbridge to Jupiter Aeternus Dolichenus, Caelestis Brigantia and Salus. 'Silvano Caelesti' occurs on a dedication by a poet in Rome.¹⁰ But this epithet is rare in the Danubian provinces. The centre of the cult seems to have been Carthage and the majority of the instances belong to North Africa. As the names Vibia and Pacata are well attested in North Africa it seems likely that at least the wife of the centurion had some connection with North Africa and from there added an epithet to this composite dedication.

As Professor E. Birley suggested,¹¹ this centurion may well be identical with the T. Flavius Verecundus from Claudia Savaria, centurion of Legio XIII G.M.V. who dedicated an altar to Mithras at Carnuntum (*CIL*, III, 4416). He could have been transferred to Legio VI Victrix in Britain.

It is not clear what command Flavius Verecundus held at Westerwood or whether he and his wife were on a temporary visit. He may have commanded an auxiliary contingent at that fort, as Flavius Betto did¹² at Rough Castle. Or he may have had a detachment of his own legion, VI Victrix, under his command, for at one time similar detachments manned the adjacent forts of Castlecary¹³ and Croy Hill.¹⁴ The composite nature of this dedication suggests that Verecundus had seen service in North Africa as well as in Pannonia and perhaps the Rhineland. As an alternative explanation the inclusion in the dedication of the term Caelestes, so frequent in North Africa, may have been due to Vibia Pacata, whose two names are well attested there.



a Roman altar from Westerwood



b Norse Viking-age coin from Jarlshof, obverse above, reverse below (scale $\frac{2}{1}$)