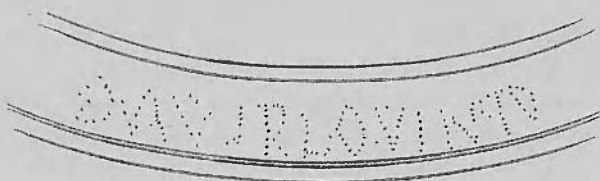


Umbo of a Roman Shield, found at Matfen, Northumberland.
Diam. 8 in.



Inscription punctured on the rim of the Umbo.
Full size.

ON BOSSES OF ROMAN SHIELDS FOUND IN NORTHUMBERLAND
AND LANCASHIRE.

THE interesting relic represented in the accompanying illustration was found in the parish of Matfen in Northumberland, a little to the north of the Roman Wall; the nearest station being Halton Chesters, the Hunnum of the Notitia. It was discovered about three feet below the ground by some labourers, who, supposing it to be the lid of a pot containing treasure, turned up half the field in hopes of finding the remainder. It was exhibited to the Institute by Dr. Charlton, in December, 1857.

Its form, as will be seen, is circular, the convex portion being nearly hemispherical, and the flat rim pierced with four holes. The boss has no ornaments excepting a few engraved circles; on the rim are the traces of an inscription executed in punctured dots. From the present condition of the surface, it is difficult to ascertain the exact form of the letters, for the "pot lid" was hung up in the farmer's kitchen, where it received a weekly scouring, and owing to this, or to previous corrosion, the metal is covered with minute holes, which are easily confounded with the punctures of the letters. Indeed I feel some doubts whether the artist has not included in the woodcut some of these accidental holes. The inscription has been read DON SP IOVINTI; on examining the original, I felt nearly certain that the termination is QVINTI, and that the whole inscription might possibly read ORVSP I QVINTI, the first character being the centurial mark, and the sense being either "the centuria of Ruspius Quintus," or "of the centurion Ruspius Quintus."

This umbo is not the only one which has been discovered in England. About the year 1800 a boss was found at Garstang in Lancashire, which passed into the collection of Mr. Towneley, and is now in the British Museum. It is identical with the Matfen *umbo* in material, form, and size, and has also four holes in the rim, but it differs in being

covered with elaborate devices engraved in outline.¹ Though much oxydised, the convex portion still exhibits a warrior seated on a throne or ornamented stool, and wearing a helmet with a flowing crest; in his right hand, which is raised, he holds a lance; in his left apparently a small globe, surmounted by a bird resembling a goose or swan. The flat rim is likewise ornamented: on the upper part is a Victory seated by an altar; on the lower another Victory seated between two eagles with globes; at the sides, opposite each other, are naked male figures with spears; between these and the Victories are trophies, each formed of an oval shield crossing an octagonal one. The workmanship is evidently late Roman.

It is difficult to fix with certainty the personage delineated on this boss. Mars is rarely represented as seated, though a painting of his throne may be found among the frescoes at Herculaneum. On the other hand, Jupiter, whom the figure resembles in some respects, is not usually represented in armour. It may, however, be some topical form of one of these divinities, or possibly of Romulus, to whom altars were dedicated in Britain. The nearest resemblance to the design is to be seen on the reverse of a medallion of Constantine the Great, where a figure apparently of the emperor, seated on armour, and holding in his left hand a lance, is supporting in his right a globe, surmounted by a phoenix, which he has received from a soldier bearing a trophy. The legend is *GLORIA SAECVLI VIRTUS CAESS.*²

The shields of the ancients varied considerably at different times; the early Greek shield was circular, and of large size; it had a convex surface nearly flat in the centre, and rising abruptly at the sides from a narrow flat rim; the outside was ornamented with various devices, which were probably painted. The Etruscan shield was somewhat similar, but sloped gradually towards the rim from the centre, where there was a low boss, more for ornament than use; the surface was sometimes covered with patterns in low relief. The Romans probably adopted in early times the Etruscan form, but appear to have found it inconvenient for warfare, and retained it only for votive and ornamental

¹ This umbo is engraved in Whitaker's "History of Richmondshire," vol. ii. p. 457.

² Buonarrotti, Osservazioni sopra alcuni Medaglioni, xxxiii. fig. 2.

purposes. They are said to have borrowed from the Sabines a peculiar form of shield, the *scutum*, called by the Greeks *θυρεος*, from the similarity of its quadrangular form to a door, *θυρα*. Polybius, in describing the Roman army during the third Punic war, thus speaks of the *scutum*:³—"The armour of the Romans consists firstly of a shield (*θυρεος*), $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide in its curved surface and 4 feet long . . . It is formed of a double layer of boards fastened together with glue and linen. Its external surface is covered with calfskin, and its upper and lower margins bound with iron, to enable it to bear sword blows, and to prevent it from decaying when resting on the ground. An iron boss (*κογχος*) is then fastened to it, to resist the blows of stones and the violence of weapons of various kinds."

The form of the *scutum* is shown in several monuments, and resembles the half of a cylinder divided longitudinally. The boss mentioned by Polybius is rarely visible. This shield was chiefly confined to heavy-armed troops, and must from its size have been of considerable weight. One of its principal uses was in forming the *testudo*, a mode of attack which is represented in the Antonine column, and which Dion⁴ tells us was formed thus:—"The cavalry and light-armed being placed in the centre,—“such of the heavy-armed who have long hollow tile-shaped shields (*ταῖς προμήκεσιν ἄσπισι ταῖς κοίλαις ταῖς σωληνοεῖδεσι χρώμενοι*) are placed on the outside, forming a kind of tile-work with their shields; those who have broad shields (*πλατείας ἄσπιδας*) hold them up over their heads, so that nothing but shields is visible throughout the phalanx."

During the Imperial times we find both the *scutum* and the *clypeus* in use, the latter, however, oval in form, and with a projecting boss. In the bas-reliefs on the Trajan and the Antonine columns, we find numerous representations of shields. In the former, recording the conquests of Trajan over the Dacians, we see the Roman soldiers armed with both kinds, some few, probably German auxiliaries, have the long octagonal shield generally seen on trophies of that nation. The Dacians have oval shields differing little from those of their opponents, but the bosses are less prominent. On the Antonine Column, representing the victories of Marcus Aurelius over the Germans, we find chiefly soldiers

³ Polybius, lib. vi. 23.
VOL. XV.

⁴ Dion Cassius, lib. xlix. cap. 30.
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of the Twelfth Legion called Fulminatrix. Their shields, principally oval *clypei*, but occasionally *scuta*, are ornamented with thunderbolts, in allusion to the name of the Legion. Their enemies have either oval or octagonal shields. In most of these representations the *scutum* has scarcely any boss, while the oval shield has a prominent circular one towards the centre ; there can be little doubt, therefore, that the objects under consideration originally belonged to oval *clypei*.

The limits of this notice will not allow us to enter into the devices on ancient shields, which Vegetius calls *δειγµατα*. It will be sufficient to mention the use of inscriptions on shields, which may throw some light on the Matfen *umbo*. It was not unusual to inscribe the name of the commander, for we learn from Hirtius and Dion Cassius, that the partizans of Pompey in Spain (B.C. 48), wrote his name on their bucklers, and on renouncing him, erased it.⁵ So, likewise, we hear of Sextus Pompey's name on shields,⁶ and of Cleopatra's on those of the Roman guards.⁷ The most important notice, however, is that given by Dion Cassius⁸ in his account of the Dacian campaign of Domitian, from which we learn that the general Julianus ordered the soldiers to inscribe on the shields their own and the centurion's names, so as to be recognised if they behaved especially well or ill. This probably became the rule, as Vegetius⁹ tells us, that on the front (or back) of each soldier's shield was to be written his name, and the cohort or century to which he belonged.

Such may have been the origin of the curious inscription on the umbo found in Northumberland, which may possibly have belonged to some Roman soldier slain in a skirmish with the wild tribes to the north of the wall.

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⁵ Hirtius De bello Alex. cap. 58, 59 ;
Dion Cassius, lib. xlii. cap. 15.

⁶ Dion Cassius, lib. xlviii. cap. 30.

⁷ Dion Cassius, lib. l. cap. 5.

⁸ Dion Cassius, lib. lxxvii. cap. 10.

⁹ De Re Milit. ii. 18. The doubt as to the part of the shield which was inscribed, depends on whether we read *averso* or *adverso* : the latter seems the more reasonable.