

ON A SIGNACULUM OF ST. JAMES OF COMPOSTELLA,

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At page 179 of the twenty-sixth volume of the *Archæological Journal*, in an account of objects exhibited at the meeting held on the 4th December, 1868, two casts in plaster of Paris, taken from jet images supposed to be of St. James, were shown by Dr. Ferdinald Keller, the learned antiquary of Zurich, and are described—one of them being figured on the succeeding page. These images had been sent to him by Father Gall Morel, of Einsiedeln, about the month of June preceding. One was found in peaty soil, at the depth of several feet, near the chapel of the leprous pilgrims at Einsiedeln: it is 5 inches in length, 2 inches broad, and 1 inch thick, and is that figured at p. 180. The other is smaller, measuring only 1 inch and 3-8ths in length, and was also found in Switzerland.

Subsequently, in 1869, Dr. Keller wrote a more detailed description of these jet objects in the *Anzeiger für Schweizerische Geschichte und Alterthumskunde*, published at Zurich. That notice, in which Dr. Keller expresses the doubtless correct opinion that the figure represented is that of St. James the Greater, and is a *signaculum*, or pilgrim's sign, confirmed the previous suspicion of Mr. Joseph Anderson, that a similar figure, presented to the museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, by James Gibson Craig, Esq., a fellow of that society, was of that material and character.

In the eleventh volume of the Proceedings of that learned society at page 62, Mr. Anderson has figured and described the example under his care, and has accompanied his description by much valuable reference and observations on the subject of the representation of

the patron saint of lepers in pilgrim's garb, and the importance attached to pilgrimage made to the shrine of Saint Iago at Compostella in Galicia of Spain. He confirms the known fact that, having accomplished the object of their weary journey, the pilgrims received the blessing and obtained a *signum* or emblem of that Saint, which had also been duly blessed by the priests, and was a badge or sign of their having performed the pilgrimage. These badges or signs were formed of various materials of greater or less value, doubtless in accordance with the liberality of donation to the shrine. We are well acquainted with the numerous "pilgrim's signs" made of lead and pewter, which have been disinterred at various localities in this country and elsewhere, as also with their more numerous modern imitations; but *signacula* in other material are less common, and it is to be presumed that among the "*varias effigies Jacobi*," those so skilfully carved in jet, and which seem to have been almost special to the Compostella shrine, were only bestowed upon persons of the higher ranks.

On this part of the subject, Mr. Anderson has also gathered much information, and he notices and figures moulds for casting the more ordinary class of "signs."

My object in referring to those valuable papers, is to introduce another and perhaps more interesting example of these jet figures of St. James, which was procured by me in Italy many years since, and, if I rightly recollect, at Florence.

It represents the Saint in pilgrim's dress, the loose long garment known as the "*esclavina*" or "*pera*," reaching nearly to the ankles, and seemingly fastened at the throat with a circular *fibula*. He is bearded, and wears a large broad hat with recurved brim, the front of which is adorned with the scallop shell, the special emblem of pilgrimage to the Compostella shrine. In the left hand he holds the open book of the Gospel, to which he points with the extended index finger of the right hand; beneath the volume is seen the gourd, but its mode of suspension is not apparent; with the right arm he supports the "*bourdon*" or pilgrim's staff, the upper end of which is unfortunately wanting; to this is suspended the wallet or *gibecière*. The height of this figure, including



Signaculum of St. James of Compostella.

the shallow grounding or base on which it stands, is 3 inches and 7-10ths; width 1 inch 8-10ths, thickness 8-10ths of an inch; with the trifling exceptions of the hand pointing to the open book instead of grasping the staff, and the addition of the gourd, there would seem to be but small difference between my St. Iago and that published by Mr. Anderson; his, however, is laterally pierced, which mine has not been. But the remarkable feature in that I now describe, is the fact that it forms the centre of a group of three, St. James between two kneeling figures of much smaller size, one on either side. That on his left has been unfortunately chipped away, only its outline in front and the feet and a fold of drapery behind bearing witness to its similarity in posture to its fellow. That on the Saint's right is of a man, bearded and with head uncovered, clad in a long loose garment, girded at the waist; he kneels, his hands palm to palm are raised in the attitude of prayer, while hanging from his wrists is a chaplet of ten beads. There is considerable probability that this kneeling figure is intended as an *icon* of the pilgrim to whom the *signaculum* of the Saint originally belonged, and there is nearly equal probability that the figure on the other side, now unfortunately lost, may have represented the pilgrim's wife, who also, probably, had earned the badge of Compostella, if, as is not unlikely, these jet images of St. James were really to be obtained only by pilgrimage to that celebrated shrine. That the kneeling figure on the Saint's left was that of a woman, is confirmed by a similar group in the same material, and doubtless, emanating from the same sanctuary, which is preserved in the British Museum. In that a string of beads is also held pendant from the right hand of St. Iago; the kneeling male figure on his right holds a similar chaplet, while with one hand he clings to the Saint's staff. On his left a female kneels habited in long garb and with raised clasped hands, from which depends a rosary.

Comparing it with the engravings above referred to, and with the British Museum example, which, however, has the advantage of more perfect preservation, my own is, perhaps, of somewhat finer and more careful execution; certain details moreover would appear to have been gilt, as the hair and beard of the saint and of the male pilgrim,

the leaves of the Gospel, the scallop shell, &c. One may, I think, infer from these facts that the badge in my possession, as also that in the British Museum, were specially made for pilgrims who, together with their wives, desired to be represented in adoration on either side of St. James; pilgrims, probably of the higher class, who together had offered their prayers and their gifts before the Galician shrine.

On the other hand, that the single figures of the saint, such as those described by Dr. Keller, the one figured in our *Journal* at page 180 of vol. xxvi, and that in the Scotch Antiquaries' Museum, figured in vol. xi at page 62 of their Proceedings, were made for solitary pilgrims, perhaps less generous or less influential; and that for the greater number, the pilgrims of a more ordinary class, some smaller "sign" of less costly material and workmanship were made, and were to be obtained at Compostella.

I should be inclined to ascribe the middle of the sixteenth century as the probable period at which these groups were executed.

I have yet to direct attention to another object of equally fine and lustrous jet, the workmanship of which would seem to have been of the same period and of the same locality as that I have just described, and may perhaps have been obtained by pilgrimage to the same sanctuary, although it might possibly also record pilgrimages made to other holy places.

It is a quadrilateral and somewhat rhomboidal block of jet, with channelled sides diverging towards the rounded top, on which is a four pointed star-like ornament, pierced with a hole in the centre. The height of the block is $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch, its longest diameter $2\frac{3}{4}$, the shortest $2\frac{1}{2}$. Inserted in that hole is the stem of a brass holder, apparently of more recent workmanship, the upper part formed as a support, with diverging flat and recurved sides, for holding some object of elongated form.

At each angle the figure of a saint is cut in full relief, against what may be intended for a sort of pointed arch or tabernacle. The carving has been executed with great precision and care. First we notice St. James in pilgrim's dress, as before described, except that we miss the gourd, but have the upper end of the staff terminating

in a round knob, the hook on its side to which the wallet is attached being also visible. The next figure to the right of St. James is St. Peter, the head uncovered, the ample robe, falling nearly to the feet, is girdled at the waist and fastened by a circular fibula at the neck; in his right hand he holds the keys, in his left a book. At the angle next beyond is the figure of a saint, bare-headed, bearded, draped in a long and loose vestment, holding a sword with blade downwards in his right hand, and a book in his left. This can be no other than St. Paul. A circular spot or wound, raised *en cabuchon*, is seen on his left breast, a distinction which I do not recollect to have noticed on other figures of that saint.

The last of the series, a somewhat feminine figure to the left of St. James, is doubtless that of St. John: his head uncovered, but with hair falling on either side; he is draped in a long and loose garment, fastened by a brooch or fibula at the neck, and falling in heavy folds over an inner skirt. In his left hand he holds a chalice, from which a serpent is issuing, its head approaching the finger of St. John's right hand.

The question naturally arises, for what purpose was this carefully executed carving made? To this I can offer no certain answer, but that it may have been the foot of a reliquary or *ostensorium* is not improbable, or possibly the base for a crucifix. The brass fork is probably a more recent addition, making it serve the purpose of a support for a staff, crozier, baton, or other such object—or, as some one has irreverently suggested, for a cigar!

I would not have ventured to direct the attention of the Institute to these comparatively unimportant objects, but from the circumstance of their rarity, a fact confirmed by Mr. Anderson, who, in his paper above referred to, states his belief that the jet figure in the Scotch Antiquarian Museum is the only one in the United Kingdom; and also that mine, as well as that in the British Museum, differs from the others hitherto made known, in having iconic representations of the pilgrims for whom they were made, and of their wives, kneeling in adoration at the sides of the great Saint Iago of Compostella.