

## LISKEARD, LEGIO.

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The town of Liskeard in Cornwall has long had a puzzling connection with the Roman legions. It has been credited with a Roman name, *Legio* or *Sebasta altera legio*, and writers in the *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall* and elsewhere have conjectured that in the Roman period a legion was at some time or other in occupation of the site.

This conjecture may be confidently rejected, for the simple reason that no Roman remains have ever been found at Liskeard or in its neighbourhood. Only one object has been even cited as Roman and that may be assigned without much hesitation to a later age. It is an inscribed stone with letters in relief, now practically illegible, but once deciphered in part as *olim Marti nunc arti* or similar words; till about forty years ago it was in a wall of the Liskeard Grammar School on the site of the medieval Castle.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the lettering is on stone in relief shows that it is not Roman, for Roman lapidary monuments bear incised lettering. Doubtless it is of late medieval or modern date and records the conversion of the place from the service of the God of War (Mars) to the uses of education (*ars*) as a Grammar School. Beyond this stone, no trace of Roman antiquity has ever been assigned to Liskeard and its neighbourhood, and we may take it as certain that the town does not occupy a Roman site, legionary or other.

Whence then came the appellation *Sebasta altera legio*? It has a long and curious history, which starts early in the sixteenth century with Michael Villanovanus, better known as Servetus, enemy and victim of

<sup>1</sup> Polwhele; Allen, *Hist. of Liskeard*, p. 349; *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, 1864, i (2), p. 13; Fifty-first Report, pp. xxv,

xxviii (1869); *Journal*, x, 227. When the school was founded, seems unknown; a schoolhouse stood within the ruins of the castle in 1649 (*Lysons*, p. 201).

Calvin. Servetus in 1535, when he was barely twenty-six years old, published at Lyons a Latin edition of Ptolemy's Geography, and inserted into it the then novelty of notes, identifying various of Ptolemy's place-names with modern names. They are brief marginal notes, mostly one word long, mere identifications without statement of proofs, reasons, or authorities. In general they are not very good identifications. Ancient geography was only beginning to be understood in 1535; Servetus was a young man, and in identifying Ptolemy's place-names he was largely a pioneer and liable to a pioneer's mistakes.

For Britain he gives seventy-seven identifications. Of these about a dozen are right, relating to well-known names like *Londinium*, *Eboracum*, *Vectis*, *Lindum*, *Rutupiae* and the like: the rest are more or less wrong. He does not tell us whence he obtained them, nor can I supply his omission except by conjecture. There was, of course, some material available in 1535 to help a student of Romano-British geography. Identifications of Roman place-names occur occasionally in medieval chronicles. Accounts of sixteenth century Britain had been published before 1535 by such writers as Aeneas Sylvius (Pius II.), Virunnius Ponticus, Raphael of Volaterra, Polydore Vergil, John Major or Mair, Hector Boethius. Manuscript maps of England had been drawn up by English and foreign cartographers, and several of the early editions of Ptolemy contain a printed "nova Angliae tabula" of Italian origin. Servetus included this Italian map in his edition. But he did not use it for his identifications of place-names in Britain, since its selection and spelling of names differs entirely from his: while the rest of the material which I have just indicated, seems to have been almost unknown to him. The general character of his identifications suggests rather that he had before him an account, or perhaps rather a manuscript map of sixteenth century England, drawn up in England and differing a good deal from anything hitherto constructed.<sup>1</sup> To this

<sup>1</sup> The modern names which Servetus cites in his marginal notes are spelt in English fashion: for example, London,

not Londra, as in the printed Italian map. But his selection of name is quite unlike the known MS. English

map (if map it was) he applied the principle that ancient and modern towns often agree in site and name. We find him, for example, equating *Cataractonium* with Carlisle, *Corinium* with Gloucester, *Deva* with Doncaster, *Dunium* with Dorking or Dorchester, *Mediolanum* with Manchester, *Tamara* with "Tanerstok" (Tavistock), *Bolerium* with St. Buryan. It is plain that in each case he has selected from his map or account of England some modern name which suited, however roughly, the required position and which bore some faint similarity in spelling to the ancient name in question. It may not sound a hopeful plan; certainly it has not yielded good results in the case before us. But it was almost the only plan available in an age which possessed neither accurate maps nor adequate records of Roman remains, and it was widely used throughout the sixteenth century. Within limits it was by no means so irrational as it sounds. In Italy, France and Spain, the lands most familiar to Renaissance scholars, the modern towns do frequently stand on Roman sites and preserve in their appellations vestiges of Roman names. We need not greatly blame Servetus if he concluded the same to be true of Britain, or if in default of real indications he caught at distant and trifling similarities in site and spelling. The English antiquaries who succeeded him, Robert Talbot in 1547, Humfrey Lhuyd in 1572, Camden at the end of the century, did much the same, and our own age is not faultless in this respect.

Among these identifications of Servetus is one which now concerns us. Ptolemy, it will be remembered, inserts under the heading "Dumnonii" in his British chapter, a puzzling and probably inaccurate entry, Ἰσκα· λεγίων δευτέρα σεβαστή.<sup>1</sup> Some manuscripts and many early editions of his work break this entry into

maps, such as those facsimiled by Gough (*British Topogr.*, Vol. I) and Nordenskiöld. Possibly Servetus may have seen a map by George Lily, which is mentioned by Bale (*centuria nona*, lxxviii) and Gough, but I have never met with it and doubt if it was drawn so early as 1535. The later maps by Sebastian Münster (Basle edition of Ptolemy, 1540) and by Sebastian a

Regibus Clodiensis (1554) come much closer to Servetus, but may have been influenced by him. The suggestion of Burton (*Commentary on Antoninus*, p. 54), that Servetus copied Moletius, is impossible, since the edition of Ptolemy by Moletius came nearly thirty years after the first edition by Servetus.

<sup>1</sup> Compare *Archaeological Journal*, xlix. 181.

two, Ἴσκα and Λεγίων δευτέρα σεβαστή, each with its own latitude and longitude. Servetus follows this latter reading and accordingly has two names to identify. *Isca* he explains as Exeter, while against *legio secunda Augusta* (the Latin for Λεγίων δευτέρα σεβαστή), he put Leskerd, or as we now spell it, Liskeard. Apparently he had no better reasons than that *Legio* and Leskerd both begin with Le-, and that Liskeard is situated in the district where he supposed Ptolemy to put Legio. In a second edition of his Ptolemy (Vienne, 1541), he slightly alters the marginal "Leskerd" to "Sebasta, uulgo Leskerd."

Thus made, the identification of Legio and Liskeard found at first some credence. With many other identifications proposed by Servetus, it was admitted into standard works, such as the *Bibliotheca* of Sir Thomas Elyot (ed. 1548), the great Latin-English dictionary of the age, and the *Synonymia Geographica* of Abraham Ortelius (Antwerp, 1578), and Ortelius slightly alters the Latin from "Legio" to "Sebasta altera legio." But it was ignored by English antiquaries like Camden, who knew quite well that the Legio II. Augusta properly belonged to *Isca Silurum*, in Monmouthshire; Richard Carew, in his *Survey of Cornwall* (1602), mentioned it only to reject it; and it never passed into the main current of antiquarian literature. It maintained, and indeed still maintains, an obscure existence through casual and generally puzzled citations.<sup>1</sup> One instance of its survival is curious enough to be noticed here. The Corporation of Liskeard possesses amongst its plate a standard silver goblet, made in London in 1665, and presented to it, presumably at the same time, by Sir Chichester Wrey, Recorder of the Borough since 1661. This goblet bears on the one side the arms of Liskeard, a fleur-de-lis, and beneath that the word LEGIO.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lake, *Hist. of Cornwall*, iii. 149; RIC x. 227; Martin's *Record Interpreter* (1892), etc.

<sup>2</sup> Ll. Jewitt and W. H. St. John Hope, *Corporation Plate and Insignia*

*of Office of the Cities and Towns of England and Wales*, I. 87; information from Mr. Hope and the Town Clerk of Liskeard.