



PLATE I.—BAS-RELIEF FROM BREMENIUM.



PLATE II.—MOSAIC FROM TIMGAD, AFRICA.

A ROMAN BAS-RELIEF FROM BREMENIUM.

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Some time ago a bas-relief of considerable interest was found in the ruins of the fort of *Bremenium*, now High Rochester, in Northumberland. It is figured in Bruce's *Roman Wall* (p. 318), and it is stated in the text of that work to have been found on the *via principalis* in front of the *praetorium* and on the right of the entrance, together with a Latin inscription. Both had been employed in some later construction, probably a basin. This bas-relief is now in the museum of Alnwick Castle. (Plate I.)

Bruce saw in this relief a representation of nymphs bathing. A more recent discovery enables us to hazard a better surmise as to the subject depicted. I refer to a mosaic (Plate II) found in a house at Thamugadi (now Timgad) in Africa. In a paper which I contributed to the Centenary volume [1904] of the Society of Antiquaries of France,¹ I have described it as follows:—"The central figure represents a nude goddess kneeling on her right knee beside a basin full of water, with her right leg bent at right angles. Her head is encircled by a nimbus. A nymph holding a vase stands up half draped upon a rock rising above the water, and from the vase a stream of water falls upon the outstretched right hand of the goddess, who with her left tries to conceal her nudity. Behind this nymph on the extreme left of the scene is the trunk of a tree of which the foliage has disappeared. On the right is a second equally undraped nymph standing between two trees. In her two hands she holds a large shell, into which water falls from a pipe fixed in the fissures of the rock, and from the shell the water rebounds into the basin. At the top of the mosaic and

¹ Rec. de memoires publié par la Soc. des Antiq. de France à l'occasion de son centenaire, p. 73 *et seq.*, cf.

notre Musée de Timgad, pl. xiv and p. 37.

behind the rocks appears the torso of a figure of which nothing remains but the neck, the left ear, a part of the hair and a flap of his *chlamys* floating in the breeze. In this young man it is easy to recognise Actaeon, and in the bathing goddess a representation of Diana.

This scene, which illustrates a well-known passage in Ovid,¹ occurs often and with variations. For instance, it is to be found on the wall-paintings of Pompeii² and also on sarcophagi, on one of which, preserved in the Louvre,³ instead of two nymphs we find two children pouring water upon the goddess. This peculiarity is also to be seen in a funeral bas-relief in the British Museum.⁴ In this latter example it will be noticed that the figure of Actaeon is absent, and this is so clear that authors who have reproduced it describe it as a representation of Venus at the Bath.⁵ I will return to this point later.

Bruce's reproduction of the Bremenium stone, though fairly accurate, is wanting in character, and Dr. Haverfield, with his usual courtesy, has obtained through Lord Eustace Percy a good photograph of it for me. It should be compared with other similar monuments, most especially with the Timgad mosaic, to which it bears a striking resemblance. On it are to be found practically all the details of the mosaic: the landscape with the rock behind the goddess are the same, so too the grotto in which she is bathing, represented by a jutting arch, the crown of which is broken; the stream which flows in front of her, and the cypress which recalls the neighbouring woods.

Vallis erat piceis et acuta densa cupressu,

sings Ovid. We also see on each side of Diana the two nymphs who accompany the goddess in the Timgad mosaic. One holds a vase, representing a spring, and corresponds to the nymph who leans on an urn in the mosaic. The other holds before her a large shell, like her African parallel. Needless to say, both are local nymphs, symbolical of the water springing from the rock

¹ Ovid, *metam.* iii, 140 *et seq.*

² Helbig, *Wandgemälde der von Vesuv verschütteten Städte Campaniens*, Nos. 249 to 252.

³ Clarac, *Musée de Sculpture*, pl. cxiv, reproduced on p. 77 of my paper, fig. 3 (*vide supra*).

⁴ *Cat. of Sculpture*, iii, 2360. Robert, *Die antiken Sarcophagreliefs*, iii, 1, p. 1.

⁵ W. Altmann, *Die Rom. Grabaltäre der Kaiserzeit*, p. 162. (This has long been recognized as the Venus lavans of the Bithynian sculptor Daidalos.)

and from the grotto. Actaeon alone is missing, unless indeed his image has disappeared from the top of the grotto, together with the fragment of the stone which has been broken off; but it seems probable that he did not form part of the group, either here or on the funeral altar in the British Museum referred to above.

There is, however, another variation in the position of the goddess which is well worthy of notice. Instead of attempting to screen herself with her hand, the goddess here raises it to her head for the purpose of arranging her hair, a gesture which is characteristic of a whole category of statues of Venus.¹

One might therefore have pronounced the subject of the bas-relief of Bremenium to be the bath of Venus, were it not for the striking resemblance which it bears both in grouping and accessories to the Timgad mosaic. This resemblance once again shows us how great a liberty the Roman decorators took with the models they set themselves to reproduce.² In this case they have simply mixed the two types, with the result that they have confused the two goddesses. All they desired was the representation of a woman bathing, whether they substituted the one for the other was to them a matter of indifference. In the instance we have been considering, we need not perhaps be more precise than they, and we may as well leave the matter in uncertainty. In one respect the goddess bears a resemblance to Venus, with none of the attributes of Diana. On the other hand, the remaining figures and the details of the scene remind us of Diana surprised by Actaeon as represented on the mosaic of Timgad.³

A comparison of these two monuments gives rise to another curious observation, for the relative positions of the figures of the one, though grouped in much the same manner, are reversed relatively to the other. In the one the right leg of the goddess is bent at right angles

¹ Reinach, *Rep. de la Statuaire*, ii, p. 339 *et seq.*, and iii, p. 104 *et seq.*

² I may add an English parallel to this "contamination." A sculptured stone at Bath (*Victoria Hist. of Somerset*, i, 235) and a stone at Chester (Museum Catalogue 163) show what

seems to be the male bearded head of the female Gorgon. F. Haverfield.

³ Whatever answer may be given to this question, it is clear that the subject lends itself well to the adornment of a monumental fountain.

and the left knee rests on the ground, in the other the reverse obtains. Again, in the bas-relief of Bremenium the nymph with the shell is on the left of the spectator, and at Tingad she is on the right, and similarly the nymph with the vase changes places. It is clear that the cartoon used as model has been reversed by the artist in one of the two cases before us.

In execution the Tingad mosaic is below the level of mediocrity, and one must, without injustice, say the same of the Bremenium stone. But even the barbarity of their execution is interesting, since it shows us that in both north and south on the military frontiers of the Roman Empire local artisans were struggling to reproduce the same subjects after the current and traditional models, and that the only difference between them is to be found in the particular type of unskilfulness which distinguishes the one from the other.