

REPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS.

REPORT

PRESENTED TO THE

Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

AT ITS FORTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

MAY 24, 1887,

WITH AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY
1886—1887.

ALSO

Communications

MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

No. XXIX.

BEING No. 3 OF THE SIXTH VOLUME.

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WITH APPENDIX.



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X. ON THE EPITAPH OF M. VERRIUS FLACCUS. Com-
municated by C. W. KING, M.A., Trinity College.

[October 25, 1886.]

THE Collection of Antiquities formed by Count d'Hérisson, from long-continued excavations in Apulia and about Carthage, contained a marble slab, thus humourously described in the sale catalogue of June last: "The Epitaph of M. Verris and his brother Celsus, with two skulls, and an axe."

The merest novice in the Latin language could easily read the inscription as:

"To Marcus Verrius, son of Marcus, of the Tribe Falerina, his brother Celsus" [erected this monument]

M. VERRIO
M. F. FAL. FLACCO
CELSVS FRATER.

The words are cut in the round, bold characters, used in the later years of the Republic, but which did not outlast the first century of the Empire. The material is a slab, 28 in. long by 18 in. wide, of *Parian* marble; for the quarries of Carrara (*Luni*) were but recently worked when Pliny wrote.

The back of the stone has been left very uneven and rough, for the purpose of taking better hold upon the bedding of mortar, by which it was incrustcd in the façade of the monument, no doubt a *brick* construction. The once polished surface is much weathered, giving evidence of the many centuries during which it had maintained its original position (in which probably, it had witnessed the fall of that Empire with whose birth it was nearly co-eval) before it was buried amongst the ruins of the tomb. About one-third of the surface has suffered more corrosion than the rest, in consequence of having been covered to that extent by rubbish containing a larger admixture of lime from the disintegrated mortar.

Before attempting to identify the person thus briefly commemorated, I shall remark that the *Verria* was a plebeian family; and the *Falerina*, in which it was registered, a *Rustic* Tribe. *Flaccus* was the actual name of the deceased, for the *Nomen* and *Tribus* of the *Verria* gens had been (as was the rule) assumed by his father, originally a slave, upon becoming a freedman of that family. That *Flaccus* was a word of some Italian dialect (probably Oscan, from the analogy of *Maccus*) is fairly certain, and that, with *Bassus*, *Varus*, and the like, it denoted some personal peculiarity in the man who first bore it, cannot reasonably be doubted. It probably was synonymous with *pendulus* in the sense of "lop-eared," for its Latin derivative *flaccidus* is applied to anything that droops.

Thus far the marble is of little importance in itself, except as being a fine specimen of early Roman epigraphy: but, by the rarest good fortune, this is one of those uncommon instances, where the name and fame of the deceased are embalmed in history—a circumstance that gives the highest interest to the memorial of the man.

We learn from Suetonius that Verrius Flaccus was the son of a freedman (*libertinus*)—as was the father of his contemporary and namesake, the poet Horace. He possessed a

remarkable talent for the education of youth. His plan, apparently a novel one of his own invention, was to set his pupils themes for declamations, in which they should compete with each other for the prize, which was a *book*, valuable either for its antiquity or its beauty. The novelty of his system seems to have been the encouragement of diligence by reward, instead of by punishment for laziness. Induced by his high reputation, Augustus appointed him praeceptor to his grandsons, Gaius and Lucius, with a salary of one hundred *sestertia* a year. He also lodged Verrius together with his whole school of twenty boys in the Palace, stipulating, however, that he was not to increase the number. The grammarian added to his reputation by drawing up a set of *Fasti* (Kalendar of the Months), which were engraved on marble tablets, and inserted in the walls of the *Hemicyclium* at Praeneste, where his statue was still standing when Suetonius wrote. Verrius died at an advanced age, in the early part of the reign of Tiberius.

Ovid alludes to these Tablets, where he introduces Juno saying (*Fast.* vi. 58):—

Inspice quos habeat nemoralis Aricia Fastos,
 Et populus Laurens Lanuviique nemus;
 Est illis mensis Junonius. inspice Tibur,
 Et Praenestinae moenia sacra Deae.

From this it would appear that the *Hemicyclium* formed part of the Temple of Fortune, the great goddess of Praeneste, in the same way as it is still a remarkable architectural feature of Hadrian's Temple of Venus and Rome.

Suetonius' tradition has been confirmed by a fortunate discovery. In the year 1770, Foggini, a Roman antiquary, made excavations in the ancient Forum of Praeneste, and came upon the ruins of a circular (semi-circular?) building from amongst which he recovered the Tablets containing the Kalendar for the months of January, March, April and September, in a perfect state, together with numerous fragments of the rest.

Our Verrius appears to have been held of high authority in matters of antiquity, for Pliny quotes him no fewer than *seven* times, as a source of curious and valuable information; as the following summary of the subjects will evince.

1. That the Romans, upon laying siege to a town, began by evoking the presiding deities thereof (*in quorum tutela esset*) by promising them equal, or superior honours at Rome, a form of evocation being still preserved in the Pontifical Books. The true name of the guardian of Rome was therefore kept secret, for fear some enemy might employ it for the same purpose.

2. That *Vermilion* was in such high estimation with the ancients that the face of Jupiter Capitolinus was painted therewith on the great festivals; and also the faces of generals when they rode in triumph:—citing Camillus as an example.

3. That Tarquinius Priscus wore a tunic woven entirely of gold wire¹: an example followed by Agrippina, at the opening of the tunnel of Lake Fucinus.

4. That lampreys have *thin*, eels *thick* skins: the latter being used, according to old law, for the whipping of boys under age (*pueri praetextati*) because they were not liable to pecuniary fines; according to the rule that who cannot pay in purse, must pay in person.

5. Verrius had also collected numerous instances of sudden and painless deaths (which Pliny considers the height of felicity) from joy and similar causes.

6. That the Romans, for the first three centuries, were not acquainted with *wheat*, but lived upon *spelt* in the shape of frumity (*farre ex frumento*)².

¹ As that of Virgil's Lausus:

...molti quam neverat auro

Mater...

Forty pounds in weight of gold was obtained from the robes of the child Maria Honoria when her coffin was discovered in digging the foundation of St Peter's.

² It is true that the earliest coins of Metapontum attest that "bearded

7. That the Romans once (no date specified) exhibited fighting elephants in the Circus, and afterwards slaughtered them with darts, because they knew not what to do with them (*inopia consilii*); for they were unwilling to incur the expense of keeping such great beasts; and did not choose to make presents of them to foreign princes.

These casual extracts sufficiently indicate that had the *Res memoria dignae* of Verrius¹ come down to us, the work would have been as valuable a mine of information on subjects of Roman, as the *Deipnosophists* of Athenaeus is on those of Grecian archaeology.

The *praenomen* of our Verrius is not recorded by Suetonius, but is given as 'Marcus' by Jerome in his *Chronicon*, who puts down the grammarian as flourishing (*floruit*) at the same time

wheat", *triticum*, was the staple in southern Italy as early as 600 B.C., but it must be remembered that the Romans had little intercourse with Magna Graecia before the War with Pyrrhus. *Spelt* is the primitive form of the cereal, just emerging from the state of a *grass*: the grains smooth, and thinly set upon a long ear: and by its nature, the hardiest of its species, whence Virgil calls it *robusta farra*. The actual date of *bakers* setting up shop in Rome is given by Varro, who states that previously the citizens used corn only in the form of porridge, *pulmentam*: exactly as the Red Indians of to-day make their maize into *hominy*. Similarly this most primitive preparation of the grain constituted the "national diet" of the Celts, after they had ceased to depend solely for food upon the flesh and milk of their cattle. Jerome, squabbling with the Irishman, Celestinus, despatches him with an ironical allusion to this porridge: "Hoc non videt Celestinus Celtarum pultibus praegravatus." And Ammian notices that Julian, in the disastrous retreat from Persia, lived on nothing save "parum pultis etiam gregario milite fastidiendum;" and it must be remembered that the chief strength of his army lay in the Gauls and Germans who had followed the Emperor from the West.

¹ Quoted under that title by A. Gellius. But his most important work was the "De Verborum Significatu," only known to us by the abridgement made by Festus in the following century. From this also A. Gellius quotes largely on points of etymology. From the first-named work he cites a remarkable anecdote of the treacherous advice given by Etruscan Augurs, called in when the statue of Horatius was struck by lightning, whence "Malum consilium consulenti pessimum."

with the philosopher, Athenodorus of Tarsus. The agreement, therefore, of our inscription with Jerome in this important particular strongly supports the presumption that both refer to the same individual, whose date, again, is almost exactly ascertained from archaeological evidences deducible from the epitaph itself.

A 'T. Verrius' is one of the duumviri of Caesaraugusta (*Saragossa*), who coined brass civic pieces in the name of Augustus, in the 19th year of his reign. Can this man have been the grammarian's father? Certainly, the name of his colleague, C. Alliarus, has so rustic a sound, that we can hardly think it beneath the dignity of its bearer to have been joined in office with a manumitted slave.

Two skulls, an axe, and a great iron bangle, came to London in company with the monument, as purporting to have been disinterred in the same tomb. These human remains are very remarkable in themselves. The one is that of a man so advanced in life, that the *sutures* are entirely obliterated; yet the teeth are sound, although much ground down on one side, as if the owner had chewed on that, in preference to the other. Its form is unusually elongated, the forehead rather low, but very broad, giving evidence of considerable mental power. The other skull is that of a young man, fairly shaped, with teeth of the most exquisite regularity and enamel. As even the audacity of an Italian *antiquario* could hardly attempt to pass them off (like the celebrated duplicates of Cromwell) for those of the *same* man in youth and old age (unless indeed the mis-translation of the epitaph, above quoted, suggested the production of the remains of the *two* brothers), we must attribute them, if really exhumed in company with the monument, to long subsequent interments in its neighbourhood. But the question of ownership in the matter of these relics of humanity is settled by another consideration not to be gainsaid. It was as impossible for the corpse of the Augustan schoolmaster to

have been committed to the earth *entire*, as it was (till lately) for that of an Englishman of the same status to have been *cremated*. That these skulls must be given to some of the barbarous races, who long after the times of Verrius so frequently overran Apulia, may fairly be assumed from the nature of the articles deposited with them¹.

The *axe*, though much corroded, preserves the exact shape of the *francesca*, the formidable weapon that derived its name from the Franks. The *bangle* also, a flat bar one inch in width, intended to be irrevocably fixed on the wearer's wrist by hammering up the two ends until they overlap—is an ornament peculiar to savage races. Add to which, the sound condition of the teeth in the elder defunct, is a convincing evidence that he had never enjoyed the blessings of civilization.

It is so rare to meet with the actual memorials of personages named ever so incidentally in ancient history, that shall have escaped

“The Goth, the Christian, Time, War, Flood and Fire”

that this marble may justly be reckoned amongst the most interesting relics of antiquity that are come down to our times. As the memorial of a great scholar, who enjoyed so high a reputation in the brightest days of literature, no' more fitting shrine for its reception could have been found than the Library of Trinity College; where the *manes* of the ancient Professor will, after so many centuries of oblivion, hear his name and fame once more echoed by innumerable voices; and be (let us hope) propitious to the *second* dedicator, who has thus carried out the last lingering desire of the lost soul:

“Rinfresca la memoria mia che giace!”

¹ These *crania* are now deposited in the Museum of the College of Surgeons.

