

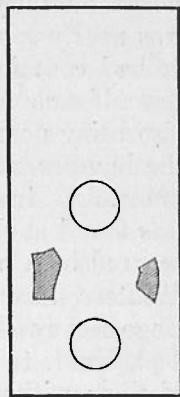
In many of our colonies, such a state of things at present exists ; and in the more fierce and uncivilised ages of the world, instances of individual communities of this kind must have been by no means rare.

JAMES TALBOT.

ACCOUNT OF A ROMAN SEPULCHRE AT GELDESTONE, NORFOLK.  
BY JAMES YATES, ESQ., F.R.S.

THIS sepulchre was discovered on the 21st of February last, at Geldestone, Norfolk, near Beccles, on the estate of John Kerrich, Esq., of Geldestone Hall.<sup>1</sup> Two labourers in the employ of Henry G. Dowson, Esq., who rents the land, were digging a trench for the purpose of draining, when they most unexpectedly broke off the top of a large glass vessel, and the appearances hereafter to be described presented themselves.

The spot is very near the present course of the Waveney, where the land rises gradually above the river. The surface of the ground is peat, under which is sand, and then blue clay. An oak board, 2 inches thick at the thickest part, and rudely shaped by the adze, lay upon the clay, four or five feet beneath the surface. The size of this board is 31 inches by 14, but it is not exactly quadrangular. Rough mis-shapen oak boards, about 7 inches high, were placed round it on edge, so as to inclose the space. On the centre of the board was placed the glass vessel, which, having no other protection than the soil, was broken by the labourers, as I have already mentioned. It may be observed, that with the exception of the chalk-flints, which abound in the gravel, no stone of any kind is found in the surrounding country. Planks of oak were consequently the most durable material that could be obtained. Indeed, the large plank which formed the foundation of the sepulchre, is still firm and strong. Those, however, which were used for the sides, are very much decayed. They are in fact reduced to the state of peat.



<sup>1</sup> The Committee would here express their acknowledgment of the kindness of Mr. Kerrich, who readily afforded every

facility and encouragement in preparing this memorial of the curious discovery made upon his estates.—Ed.

Precisely the same appearance has been observed in the uppermost extremities of oaken piles which were used to support the foundation of a Roman house, discovered about a year ago in Lower Thames Street, and these facts seem worth recording, because they clearly show, that the lapse of 1600 years is sufficient to convert the hardest oak into peat. The decayed portions of the wood found in the Geldestone sepulchre are penetrated in every direction, but chiefly in the direction of the medullary rays, by the roots of the grass and reeds which grew above them.

The glass vessel is a *diota*, nearly 12 inches high. It was found in a very fractured state, but by careful restoration of the broken remains, the annexed representation has been obtained, sufficing to convey an accurate notion of its form and proportions. (See cut.) The two handles are broad and strong, and are joined to the body by thick bosses. In the remarkable Roman interment, discovered in a tumulus at Rougham, near Bury St. Edmund's, in 1843, a glass *ossorium*, with two broad reeded handles, was found, with other objects, in a brick chamber or *bustum*. This vase, of pale bluish-green glass, measured 11 inches in height, with a projecting lip, the body was nearly spherical, and more than nine inches in diameter. It had contained bones, and its form presents much general resemblance to that of the Geldestone urn, the dimensions also being nearly the same, but the neck is much wider, and the handles more massive, so that the proportions are less graceful.<sup>2</sup> In an adjoining tumulus, a square glass *ossorium* was found at the same time, of the form most frequently discovered both in England and France, closely resembling those disinterred from the Bartlow Hills, in Cambridgeshire, by Mr. Gage Rokewode.<sup>3</sup> In a stone sepulchral chest also, at Southfleet, Kent, two cinerary glass urns were found in 1802, one of them without handles, the other being a *diota*, of similar form to that discovered at Geldestone, but of less elegant outline, the neck short; the height of this urn was 15 inches.<sup>4</sup> So far as I have been able to learn,<sup>5</sup> no other glass

<sup>2</sup> An interesting account of this discovery was published by the Rev. Professor Henslow, and "sold for the benefit of the Suffolk Hospital," 1843.

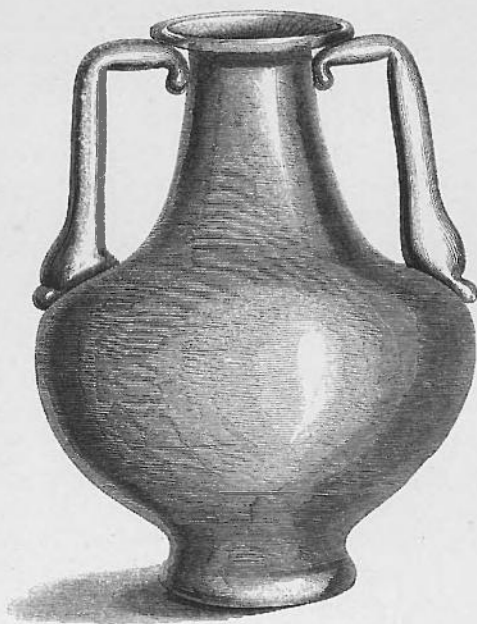
<sup>3</sup> *Archaeologia*, vol. xxvi., pl. xxxii.; vol. xxvii., p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Archaeologia*, vol. xiv., p. 221.

<sup>5</sup> I refer to the collection in the British

Museum; to some, which were found at Little Linton, Cambridgeshire, and which are at present in the library of Clare Hall, in Cambridge; to those described in the *Archaeologia*, vol. x., pp. 131, 345; vol. xii., p. 96; vol. xxvi., p. 300; and to that found at Caerleon, and represented in Lee's "Roman Antiquities of Caerleon."

ROMAN INTERMENT AT GELDESTONE, NORFOLK.



Glass Vase (diota) used as an Ossorium

Height, 11½ inches; greatest diameter, 9 inches.

vase, used for burial, has been found in this country, which precisely resembles the present specimen, approaching, as it does, pretty nearly to the form and size of the celebrated Portland Vase, though of course not to be compared with it in workmanship, fineness, and beauty. The vase, found at Geldestone, is entirely without ornament. It has a flange at top and bottom, made by the glass-blower while the glass was soft. It appears that no tool has been attached to the bottom, but that, after the artificer had blown the glass into a kind of oval, he pushed its lower extremity inwards, at the same time producing an expansion of the circumference outwards, so as to form a very excellent foot for the vessel to stand upon. With equal dexterity he has turned the lip outwards, so as to produce the corresponding flange at the top.<sup>6</sup> I could not ascertain that the vessel had any lid. When I first saw some of the fragments, they appeared to me so fresh, that I doubted whether the vessel was Roman. I did not perceive the slightest appearance of corrosion. Nevertheless, the form and colour were exactly those with which I was familiar as characteristic of Roman glass. In illustration of this peculiarity, I may quote the following remarks of Sir Joseph Banks, in his description of an urn which was found, A.D. 1794, at Ashby Puerorum, in Lincolnshire (*Archæologia*, vol. XII., p. 96):—

“The urn is made of strong glass, well-manufactured, greenish, but not more so than green window-glass usually is: when found, it was perfect in all respects, and had not suffered any of that decay, which generally renders the surface of Roman glass of a pearly or opaline hue; for the surface was as smooth and as firm as if it had newly come from the fire.”

The Geldestone urn contained the remains of the burnt bones of a child apparently not more than two or three years old. I shall hereafter produce the evidence, which, I think, proves them to have been the ashes of a little boy. Those remains which I particularly distinguished, were portions of the cranium showing the sutures, of the pelvis, the ulna or femur, and some of the ribs. These bones had evidently been calcined by fire, being full of minute cracks.

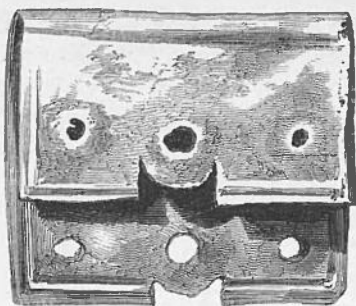
<sup>6</sup> The dimensions of this vase are, as follows: Height, 11½ in.; diameter at the largest part, 9 in.; diameter of the mouth, 5½ in.; diameter of neck, 3 in.; diameter of the base, 4½ in. The space between

the neck and the handles is somewhat unequal. A cinerary glass *diota*, very similar in form, discovered in a Roman tomb near Wiesbaden, is preserved in the Museum at that town.

They were dry, and generally white; but, in some parts, where there had been marrow, they had a tinge of black.

At the bottom of the urn, under the bones, lay a Roman second brass coin, which, according to the ancient custom, had probably been placed under the tongue of the child before cremation, to pay for the ferry over the Styx. It bears the head of Sabina, the wife of the Emperor Hadrian, and the former part of the following legend, which appears on coins of the same type,—SABINA AUGUSTA HADRIANI AUG. P P. On the reverse, is the figure of Vesta, seated on a throne, with a veil upon her head, which falls down over her shoulders; holding a spear in her right hand, and the Palladium in her left, with the letters S. C. underneath.

The urn also contained the fragment of an ornament made of thin bronze plate, gilt, a figure of which, of the size of the original, is here given.



This appears to me to have been the upper part of the *bulla*, which was worn up to a certain age by the son of a Roman of rank and distinction. The mode of wearing it suspended upon the boy's breast is shown on numerous busts, bas-reliefs, and other ancient monuments. (See Spon, *Misc.*

*Erud. Ant.*, p. 299; Middleton, *Ant. Erud. Mon.*, p. 22, *Tab. III.*, fig. 2; Ficoroni, *Bolla d'Oro*, &c.)

It was called *Bulla*, as is stated by the old lexicographer Papias, because it was like a bubble floating on the surface of water. In this simple form it is represented on many ancient monuments. But it was afterwards ornamented in various ways, and generally by an addition in some degree resembling a hinge, and formed with a groove along the top for the reception of the wire or cord, by which it was hung round the neck of the child. This is the part which has been preserved in the Geldestone urn, and our specimen shows the groove for the reception of the wire or cord, as well as the holes by which this portion was rivetted to the *bulla*, properly so called.

For the further illustration of this part of the subject I beg to call the attention of the Society to some of the more elaborate bullæ, which have escaped the ravages of time.

Ficoroni gives the figure of one, in which the part added for the purpose of suspension is very simple, being nothing more than a small short pipe, through which the cord passes. Another, much more complete and of gold, is in the British Museum. A representation of it, the size of the original, is here given.<sup>7</sup> A much larger and finer one belonged to the Chigi Museum at Rome. The name CATVLVS is engraved upon it, and is supposed to have been the name of the wearer. This is published by Causeus in his treatise *De Vasis, Bullis, &c.* (tab. vi.), which is reprinted in Grævii *The-saurus*, tom. xii., p. 958. But that which throws the most light upon the Geldestone specimen, coming nearest to it in all the circumstances, is one of which the following account is given.<sup>8</sup> Some



Golden Bulla, preserved in the British Museum.

labourers, employed in searching for antiquities at a place near Rome, discovered a marble sarcophagus, containing an urn of oriental alabaster. In the urn were burnt bones, and among them was found the golden bulla, a figure of which is published both by Ficoroni and by Middleton. Ficoroni purchased the bulla, and soon afterwards sold it to Dr. Conyers Middleton, who showed it to Montfaucon, at Paris, and then brought it to England. Probably this fine relic is in England at the present time, but in whose possession I cannot tell.

Besides the glass vessel, the labourers found on other parts of the board a flat earthenware cup, with a lid of the same material, and two or three potsherds. It appeared that the sepulchre had never before been disturbed. It was covered with sand; and over the sand was peat, as already mentioned, with grass and reeds, the roots of which penetrated in all directions through the contents of the urn, and the soft decayed planks forming the sides of the inclosure.

LAUDERDALE HOUSE, HIGHGATE,  
March 2nd, 1849.

J. Y.

<sup>7</sup> For permission to make use of this illustration, our thanks are due to the Publishers of Dr. Smith's valuable "Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities,"

in which it was given, *Art. Bulla*.—ED.

<sup>8</sup> Ficoroni, *La Dolla d'oro de' Fanciulli nobili Romani*. Roma, 1732. Middleton, loc. cit.