

ON A ROMAN LANX FOUND AT WELNEY, NORFOLK.

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HAVING in the course of last Christmas vacation spent a few days in the fen country lying between Ely and Huntingdon, I was much surprised at the variety of interesting questions suggested on the most cursory survey of what is described in county histories as a dreary and uninteresting plain. Year by year the ploughman brings again to light huge trunks of sound but blackened oak ; acorns and hazelnuts, as of last year's growth ; horns of red deer, perfect as when shed by the monarchs of the woodland, who shall say how many centuries ago ?—objects these that tell of a primeval forest age which must have been succeeded by alternations of submergence and states of rank, swampy vegetation, for in many parts horizontal seams of alluvial soil are found dividing deep layers of peat. The progress of agriculture having by arterial drainage made fertile, for corn and grass, spots formerly little visited except for the flocks of wild fowl to be shot, or the curious butterflies to be caught, we are able at last to begin our conjectures as to the mode of life of the—may I say—antediluvian inhabitants of this fen country, on which in later times the old Roman castle of *Camboritum* looked down as a peninsula on a number of islets.

In order at once to consolidate and manure the upper stratum of peat, which years of drainage have reduced to less than half its original thickness (within forty years a subsidence from 9 to 4 ft. in depth has been observed), the farmer every eight or ten years spreads on the surface, and

¹ This remarkable vestige of Roman occupation of the Fens of Cambridgeshire and adjacent counties was exhibited, through the friendly intervention of the author of this memoir, by Mr. Goodman, on whose property it was found, at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, on December 3, *ult.* See Proceedings at the

Meeting, *infra*. It was subsequently submitted to the Society of Antiquaries, and also to the Cambridge Philosophical Society. On the last mentioned occasion the memoir, here reproduced by the obliging permission of the author, was read.

ploughs in, a layer of stiff clay brought up by means of trenches 3 ft. wide at intervals of about 15 yards. Rarely are these clay-pits opened without disclosing not only the vegetable and animal traces of ages past, which I have mentioned, but also implements of flint, bronze, and iron, which admit of close comparison with those already classified by the laborious skill of Dr. Keller, Sir John Lubbock, and other pre-historic archæologists. Nor are clear evidences of Roman occupation wanting, not only as elsewhere in bulwarks against a common enemy, the ocean (*e. g.* at Lynn), and in roads (*e. g.* that from Denver through March to Peterborough), but again and again, as an elevation of a few feet above the surrounding fen finds us on what is still an island, speaking for itself in such names as Ston-ey, Angles-ey, &c., we discover that never-failing evidence of Roman habitation, pottery, as well as arms and domestic appliances for use and luxury.

It is an object of the last class that, by the favor of the owner, Mr. Albert Goodman, was recently submitted to the examination of the Archæological Institute,—a charger, which, for reasons that may prove satisfactory, I think must be considered as of Roman work. It was found in the spring of 1864, at the depth of 14 inches, in the course of gault-ploughing a piece of old grass land, about 200 yards from the Hundred Feet River at Welney, once an islet in the district of Wella which now comprises the parishes of Upwell, Outwell, and Feltwell, in the county of Norfolk.

Various opinions have been suggested in regard to the original intentions or use of the large disk of metal thus brought to light; there can, however, be little doubt that it is a specimen of the flat charger or dish used by the Romans to hold a large joint of meat, or, as in a case mentioned by Horace,² (illustrated and confirmed by an ancient fresco found near S. John Lateran at Rome,) a boar entire, and also serving occasionally for sacrificial rites.³ Such an appliance of the table was properly designated a *lanx*, and the epithets, "panda," "cava," and "rotunda," commonly applied to it by ancient writers, are obviously most appropriate. To the kindness of Professor Liveing I owe an analysis, which shows that the metal of this *lanx* is 80 per cent. tin, with $18\frac{1}{2}$ lead, and a little trace of iron, thus nearly corresponding with the *argen-*

² Sat., lib. ii. 4, v. 41.

³ Virg. Georg., lib. ii. v. 194, &c.

tarium of Pliny,⁴ and with certain oval cakes that have been found in the bed of the Thames, near Battersea, on which are stamped the Christian monogram, with the word "*spes*" and the name, as it is believed, of Syagrius, perhaps the same of whom we hear as secretary to the Emperor Valentinian.⁵ One of these cakes weighs nearly 111 ounces.

In the term *ἐὰνὸς κασσίτερος*, as designating the material of which Hephæstus made the greaves of Achilles,⁶ we probably find the earliest mention of a compound of this kind; and Boeckh⁷ gives *καπτιτέρω ἐνώδια* (? ἑλλόβια) *πέντε* as occurring in a list of offerings of plate and jewelry dedicated, in Olymp. 95, 3 (B.C. 398), to the gods of Athens. The pliability of such metal may be hinted at in the words of Juvenal:⁸—

Aspice quam magno *distendat* pectore lancem
Quæ fertur domino squilla

as is seen also in the passage from Horace quoted above.

Of the *lanx* before us the diameter is 2 ft. 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., equal to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft. of Roman measure, the weight 30 lbs.—excessive, according to our modern ideas of the capabilities of servants; but Pliny⁹ tells of a Spanish *dispensator* (one of the slaves of the Emperor Claudius) who had a *lanx* of 500 lbs. weight, and eight more of upwards of 100 lbs. each, to make a complete service, if such be the true meaning of "*Comites ejus octo octingentarum et quinquaginta librarum*," and naively adds, "*Quæso quam multi eas conservi ejus inferrent aut quibus cœnantibus*." Tertullian, alluding to the passage, calls such a dish "*promulsis*," meaning, I suppose, "*promulsidarium*." In the centre, on the upper surface, which is slightly dished to prevent the gravy flowing over, there is a circular compartment, nearly 9 inches in diameter, encircled with a very elaborate diapered pattern of peculiar type, produced apparently by means of the punch, chisel and hammer: this compartment, of which the beautiful design is somewhat indistinct in the present condition of the surface, is surrounded by a bordure, decorated with trailing or branched work, in the outer circle of which may be discerned, in ten

⁴ Pliny, Hist. Nat., lib. xxxiv. c. 20 and 48.

⁵ Proceedings, Soc. Antiq. second series, vol. ii. p. 87; vol. iv. p. 381.

⁶ Il. xviii. 612.

⁷ Inscr. i. 150, § 48.

⁸ V. 80.

⁹ Pliny, Hist. Nat., lib. xxxiii. c. 52.

spaces, at equal intervals, certain letters, which my friend, Mr. Albert Way (who has materially aided me in the present investigation), thinks may form the words VTERE¹ FELIX; I cannot, however, state more in support of this view than that there is certainly a V and an X, with eight intersecting arcs between them, and that in several of the intersections the letter E may be distinguished. Padre Garrucci, however, and Henzen, two of our highest authorities in this branch of archæology, insist that there are sufficient proofs of the reading VTERE FELIX, and that the letters cannot be otherwise explained. Of these some appear to be deeply incised, while others are embossed in slight relief. On the reverse of the *lanx* there is a central circle in relief, possibly thus fashioned to give more substantial support, and to prevent the risk of bending or falling out of shape that might occur in so large a flat plate of metal, when a heavy joint of meat was carried upon it. As to how our relic reached the position in which it was recently found, whether by the upsetting of a boat or otherwise, only the vaguest conjectures can be formed; but, from the comparatively slight depth in the peat at which so heavy a vessel lay, we may perhaps infer that the submergence of the fen country had taken place at a period already remote, when the Romans first planted their garrisons in Britain.

Although few examples of the *lanx* are to be found in collections of Roman utensils, they have occasionally occurred. A large plain *lanx* of silver, of circular form (diameter 17 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches), is to be seen in the jewel-room at the British Museum.² In Lysons' *Reliquiæ Britannico-Romanæ*, vol. i., we find one figured similar in style and material, as compared with that obtained at Welney, but inferior in size and quality of decoration, which was found near Manchester on the site

¹ This kindly aspiration (which may be compared with Macbeth's—

“Now good digestion wait on appetite,
And health on both!”)

is read on an amulet figured by Spon (*Misc.* 297, 11); on a silver spoon found at Augst (the ancient Augusta Rauracorum) near Basle (*Or. Inscr.* i. 428); on a bronze patera figured by Buonarrotti (*Med. Ant. post. T.* 37); and on a silver votive dish found at Perugia (*Gud. suppl.* xvii.), in the form
DE DONIS DEI ET DOMNI PETRI VTERE

FELIX CVM GAVDIO. In a more tender sense it occurs in the words “*sit tibi imperium meum cum hac puella concessum, utere ea felix*”—(Greg. Tur. vi. 30) with which the dying Tiberius II. made Mauricius at once his son-in-law and successor on the throne. Buonarrotti also (*Vasi di V.* 208) thus interprets VT FX, placed around the figures of a bride and bridegroom on an antique gem of green jasper.

² This object is now placed with the Blacas Collection, of which, however, as I am informed, it did not form a part.

of Mancunium, with two others. These three measured, in diameter, $14\frac{7}{8}$ in., $17\frac{3}{4}$ in., and 20 in. respectively, or $1\frac{1}{3}$, $1\frac{1}{2}$, and nearly 2 Roman feet. I have failed to ascertain the existence of any pewter vessels of Roman work in continental museums. Their manufacture may have been exclusively carried on in Britain.

It will be well worth while to consider whether chemistry may not supply us with some agent that shall arrest the exfoliation, which has already done so much to mutilate the surface of the *lanx* found at Welney.

Besides numerous oak trunks, the only other objects discovered underground on the same estate are, a small pointed blade $6\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, and $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. broad at the hilt, probably one of the earliest forms of dagger known in the bronze age, and of somewhat unusual type, and also a well-preserved antler shed by a young red deer; but the present tenant, Mr. G. Daintree, having promised ere long to make a careful sounding of the whole field in which the treasure under consideration once more saw the light, I have little doubt that there is at or in the vicinity a rich and instructive harvest in store for the classical antiquary, especially as vases full of Roman coins have been found in the adjoining parish of Upwell.