

ON AN INSCRIBED VOTIVE TABLET FOUND AT BIN-
CHESTER (THE ANCIENT VINOVIUM), CO. DURHAM,
IN 1879.

By the Rev. Prebendary SCARTH, M.A.

The name and position of Vinovium will probably be familiar to many who have taken an interest in Roman remains in the North of England, and have examined Mr. Maclauchlan's survey of the line of the Watling Street, made for Algernon, Duke of Northumberland. It will be seen from the survey that it is situated at a bend of the river Wear, in the county of Durham, and lies on the opposite or northern side of that river, directly facing the park of the Bishop of Durham, at Bishop Auckland. The position is very strong, the ramparts well defined, and it has been described by Camden, and by Burton in his commentary on Antonine. It is given by the geographer Ptolemy as one of the cities of the Brigantes, and is mentioned together with Epiacum (Lanchester), and Cateractonium (Caterick), being placed between them. In past years several interesting inscriptions have been found there, and they have been recorded, and may be seen in Hubner's "Britanno-Roman Inscriptions," vol. vii, of the *Corpus I.L.*, edited by Professor Mommsen.

The station is well known to local antiquaries, and has been described by the county historian Hutchinson, who mentions the remains that were brought to light, as the bank above the river Wear, on which it is situated, gave way, and slipped down to the level of the river.

No attempt had been made to investigate this station until the year 1878, when permission was obtained to uncover the remains, and ascertain what indications of former occupation still existed.

The proprietor of the land, the Bishop of Durham, and the tenant, equally concurred in the desire for investi-

gation, which has taken place under the auspices of Dr. Bruce, and the Rector of Byer's Green, the Rev. R. E. Hooppell, LL.D.

The latter gentleman has read a very interesting account of the result of the exploration of the station to the Society of Antiquaries, Newcastle-on-Tyne (February 26th, 1879), which has since been printed.

This has been followed by an account of the Votive tablet discovered in the autumn of the present year (1879). Unhappily a portion of the tablet has been broken off and lost, but the part that remains enables the whole to be for the most part accurately restored.

The inscription is as follows (the missing portion is included in brackets):—

[AES]CVLAPIO
[ET] SALVTI
[PRO SALV]TE. ALAE. VET.
[TONVM] C.R. M. AVRE.
[L.CRV]S]OCOMAS. ME.
[V. S] L. M.

Read thus—To Esculapius and Salus. For the health of the Ala (or Wing) of the Vettones, Roman citizens, Marcus Aurelius Crysocomas (or Habrocomas) Physician, willingly and deservedly pays his vows.

The tablet is erected to Æsculapius and Salus, and is dedicated by a Physician, whose cognomen must be left to conjecture, as the first portion of the name is lost, and the letters OCOMAS only remain, which may be variously supplied as in the above rendering.

The chief interest of this inscription consists in its being a further testimony to the fact that the Roman troops in Britain were supplied with medical officers, and secondly, it leads to the presumption that the Ala of Vettones, or body of Spanish cavalry, were stationed at Vinovium.

Some years since a very interesting essay was written by the late eminent physician, Sir James Y. Simpson, Bart., on the subject "Was the Roman Army provided with Medical Officers." This is now published with his other Archæological Essays (1872).

In this essay a number of inscriptions are given, some being similar to the Binchester "find."—(See Gruter, supposed to be found at Rome.)

ASCLEPIO ET
SALVTI
COMMILITONVM
SEX TITVS ALEXANDER
MEDICVS . CHO . V . PR.
DONVM DEDIT

Line erased on stone

AVG . VIII.
T. FLAVIO SABINO^{COS.}

On this stone the name of Domitian is erased, in whose reign it had been cut, but the year is marked by the name of the consul, T. Flavius Sabinus. This places the date before the end of the first century, at which time we see that the Roman army was supplied with medical officers. Sextus Titus Alexander, Physician to the 5th Pretorian cohort, offered a gift to Esculapius and to Salus, or for the health of his fellow soldiers.

The wording of this inscription is different to that lately found at Binchester. This latter has the words PRO SALVTE after the name of the god Salus, as may be inferred from the TE remaining in the third line, but the inscription given in Gruter has these words omitted, and the divinity Salus seems to have a two-fold meaning; another similar inscription is given in Gruter (p. 68, 2) where PRO SALVTE is also omitted after SALVS.

The North of England has been somewhat rich in Roman monuments, erected either by, or in commemoration of, medical officers connected with the army.

At Housesteads (Burcovicus), in Northumberland, was found a very perfect monument to ANICIVS INGEVNVS, who died at the early age of XXV, and is styled MEDICVS ORDINARIVS of the first Tungrian cohort.¹

At Lanchester (Epiacum), not far distant from Binchester, being the next station northward in the line of the Watling-street, a Greek inscription to Esculapius was found, put up by Titus Flavius Titianus, the *χλιαρκος* or tribune. It is also inscribed in Latin,² but is imperfect.

Another Greek inscription was found at Chester, and is dedicated by Hermogenes a physician, to the gods the perpetual healers;³ only a part of the altar remains.

¹ See Bruce's *Roman Wall*; also *Lapidarium Septentrionale*.

² See Hubner's *I.B.L.*, No. 431.

³ See Hubner's *I.B.L.*, p. 48.

It has been supposed that the dedicator was physician to the Emperor Hadrian, and it is about the date of that emperor.

Physicians appear to have held various ranks in the Roman armies.

Thus we have *Medici Alarum*, *Medici Cohortum*, *Medici Legionum*, also *Medicus Duplicarius Triremis* (one of the proofs that medical officers were on board the fleets also).¹ I need not mention the other titles which were not essentially military or naval.

Vegetius, when describing the duties of the "*Prefectus castrorum*," mentions that they extended over the sick soldiers and those physicians who had the care of them.²

The next point which is of interest in this newly-found inscription is, that it commemorates the Vettones or Spanish cavalry, from the province of Salamanca, between the Douro and the Tagus.

They are mentioned by Lucan in his *Pharsalia*, book 4, "*Vectonesque leves, profugique a gente vetustà Gallorum*," and Silius Italicus also mentions them (*Punic War*, book 3), and celebrates the swiftness of their horses.

They are mentioned in several inscriptions found in Britain, one at Bowes in Yorkshire,³ one found in Bath,⁴ another lately found at Brecon,⁵ and one at Chester. This latter is now in the British Museum, and is an altar dedicated *FORTVNAE REDVCI AESCVLAP. ET. SALVTI EJVS*.⁶

Eight inscribed stones have been found at Bincchester; and three of these, including the one here described, mention the Vettones.

The monumental stone in Bath seems to have been erected to a soldier of the Vettonian Ala, who had come there for the benefit of the hot springs, and died; and that found at Bowes commemorates the restoration of a building which had been burned, and was restored under the supervision of a Prefect of the Vettonian Ala. Bincchester is not more than eighteen miles from Bowes,

¹ See *Inscrip. Lat. Selec. Orelli*, Turici, 1828, 3507, 3508, 448, 4996, 3648; also Gruter, *Inscrip. Rom.*, p. 68 and 269, *Museum Veronense*, p. 120.

² *Vegetius*, lib. ii, cap. 10.

³ See Horsley's *Brit. Rom.*

⁴ See *Aquæ Solis*, p. 64.

⁵ See *Archæological Journal*, vol. xxxvi, p. 161; also *Lapidarium Walliæ*, pl. 42, fig. 3, and p. 76.

⁶ See Hubner's *I.B.L.*, p. 48.

and it is not improbable that the Vettonian Ala, of which he was prefect, was stationed at Vinovium.

An altar, now in the Chapter library at Durham, found at Bincchester, is dedicated by MARCVS VALERIVS FVLVIANVS PRAEFECTVS EQVITVM. Another is a sepulchral monument to an officer named NEMONTANVS, a decurion, corresponding to our captain of cavalry, both officers stationed at Vinovium; and we have other inscriptions on which the letters VETT occur at Bincchester.

A tile has been found with the letters NCON. The first or *left*-hand stroke of the last letter is detached from the v, this has been read both as iv and as n, and the whole lettering as either :—

Numerus Cohortis quartæ,
or " " Concordientium,
or " " Consaturentium,

Dr. Hooppell supposes this to indicate a company of the Vettonian Ala recruited in the neighbourhood of Concordia¹ or Consabrum, cities of Spain, near the Vettonian borders, if not within them.

Other tiles have the mark NCON, where the *right*-hand stroke is detached instead of the left, and this seems to confirm the reading; but more tiles may be found and the uncertainty cleared up.

Dr. Hooppell has, in his lecture² given at Bishop Auckland, enumerated all the discoveries made in the recent excavations.

He seems to have come to the conclusion that the site was occupied before Roman times by the Brigantes, the ancient inhabitants of this part of Britain. Traces of their ramparts still remain, and the Roman walls of the station have been erected on some portions of the British camp. This succession of structures has been noticed in other places in Britain, which I need not here enumerate. There seems also to be proof that the station after being occupied and fortified by the Romans, afterwards fell into neglect and partial ruin, and was again re-edified at a later period of Roman dominion. Three distinct periods of occupation are therefore to be traced.

¹ See *Orelli Inscriptions L.S.C.*, Tur. 1828, No. 4082.

² "Vinovium the buried Roman city, as

revealed by recent explorations."—Times and Herald Office, Bishop Auckland.

During the excavations this line of the ancient ramparts has been explored, and also the main street of the camp. Baths were known previously to have existed, but more have been laid open, and important buildings have been traced within the enclosure. Coins and a variety of pottery and other objects have been discovered. The coins seem to throw light upon the period of Roman occupation.

I cannot but think that great praise is due to those who have promoted these very interesting investigations, and for the careful way in which every discovery has been recorded. Much probably remains to be discovered, and other inscriptions not less interesting than the one here described, may reward the toil of uncovering.

There is much more yet to be gathered from researches within the stations which accompany the lines of Roman roads. The recent discoveries at South Shields,¹ as well as at Binchester, should stimulate efforts elsewhere. A great deal has come to light since Horsley collected into one volume the fragmentary remains of Roman power in Britain.

If we compare the *Britannia Romana* with the 7th vol. of the *Inscriptiones Britannia Latinæ*, we see how many inscribed stones have been found and chronicled within less than a century, and as the sword is uncovered from the sites which have lain so long unmarked or unexamined, who can say what confirmations of history and what new light may not arise upon a period of our history, fraught with the highest interest to every inhabitant of Britain?

P.S.—Since writing the above I have seen an account of the Saxon Church at Escombe, in the co. of Durham, lately brought into notice through a paper by the Rev. Dr. Hooppell, in the last number of the Journal of the British Archæological Association (vol. xxxv, pt. iv, p. 380). In it he says "The walls of the church are, as will be concluded from their thickness, exceedingly massive. They are built of Roman stones brought from the neighbouring Roman station (about two miles off) of Vinovium. Many of them have the peculiar Roman broaching or

¹ See *Archæological Journal*, vol. xxxvi. p. 156, 7, 8.

tooling upon them. One has a pellet within an annulet, another has the letters

LEG. VI.

As the stone stands in the wall, these letters are inverted. Many more evidences of Roman work may exist in the stones at present undiscernible, as the whole church, with the exception of the west end, was covered in early times (probably in the early English period) with rough-cast plaster, the falling off or removal of which in some places has revealed those mentioned." As the preservation and repair of this interesting church is contemplated, and funds are being raised for the purpose, we may hope that further discoveries may be made. The building has a double interest: first, as one of the few remains of Saxon architecture remaining in Britain; and secondly, as being built out of the materials of a still earlier structure of Roman date.