



ALTAR TO THE GODDESS LATIS (†),
now in the Carlisle Museum.

Photo, L. E. Hope.

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ART. XIV.—*The re-discovery of a small Roman household altar.* By the late REV. CANON RAWNSLEY.

Read at Carlisle, April 15th, 1920.

THERE has lately come into my possession a remarkable miniature Roman altar whose re-finding sounds like a fairy tale.

Two years ago some people at Kirkbampton excavating ground by a cottage unearthed a rough little box, which contained a stone with an inscription upon it. The box was given to me by a Carlisle friend to whom it had been given by the finder. I took it to Mr. Hope and we immediately realised that it was the smallest altar ever seen at the Carlisle Museum.

It measures in height $3\frac{7}{8}$ inches and in width $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches. It is made of fine-grained, micaceous red sandstone. The lettering is well and clean cut, but the fourth line is somewhat mutilated; and as we were unable to satisfy ourselves as to the sense of this line we sent a squeeze of the inscription to a colleague of the late Prof. Haverfield, Mr. J. G. C. Anderson, to decipher. We were not quite prepared for the substance of his kind reply, for in it he told us that so far from being a new discovery it was the re-discovery of a well-known altar already described in *Corpus Inscriptionum* and illustrated in *Lapidarium Septentrionale*.

The cut in the latter work is not strictly accurate, and Mr. Hope undertook to photograph the altar to size, a print of which is reproduced herewith. Hübner's reading of the inscription given in *Corpus Inscriptionum*, 1873, which Mr. Anderson confirms, is as follows:—

DEAE LATI LVCIVS VRSEI.

“To the Goddess Latis, Lucius (son) of Urseius.”

Hübner says the altar was found in 1843 near the ruins of a fort at Kirkbampton, and refers to a note on it in Whellan's *History of Cumberland and Westmorland* (p. 173), where the reading of the fourth line is given as VES There is also a note on Bruce's reading in which it is given as VRSITI. He further refers to the inscription on an altar found at Chesters where the Goddess dedicated is named RATIS. There is an altar in the Carlisle Museum, found at Birdoswald, dedicated to LATIS; whilst from the same camp there is one to RATIS; so it would seem that two deities with very similar names were worshipped along the Roman Wall.

In the *Lapidarium Septentrionale*, published in 1875, and edited by Bruce, our altar is again figured and it is stated that "this very small altar was found in 1843 near a place called Fallsteads or Foldsteads about a mile south of Kirkbampton where there are some ancient entrenchments"; and that "this and the altar to Latis found at Birdoswald are the only two examples of altars dedicated to an otherwise unknown goddess."

"There is some doubt," continues the writer, "as to the cognomen of the dedicator. It is probably VRSEIVS, a name not without example"; but Mr. Anderson believes that as a name it is unique. We are told that at the time of making the woodcut in *Lapidarium* (1875) the altar was in possession of Mr. Richard Hodgson of Kirkbampton.

It is surely of great moment that so interesting a little dedicatory altar, in such good preservation, should not have been irretrievably lost; it looks as if the little box in which it was re-discovered is the one in which it may have been packed for sending to—probably—London or Newcastle, in order to be drawn for engraving; and that on return it had not been opened and was eventually cast into a refuse hole as worthless and so lost to us for over forty years. Thanks to my friend, it will now be

preserved for the public, for I am handing it over to the Museum Committee to be placed in the Carlisle Museum Collection.

[This altar is Hübner, C.I.L. vii, 938, = Bruce, *Lap. Sept.*, 518. Bruce's woodcut reads VRSIII (=VRSEI, as Bruce transcribes the name) which Hübner appears to have seen and misread as intended for VRSITI, the second of the three r's having a rather large serif at the top. There is no evidence that Bruce ever, as Hübner asserts, read VRSITI. But the correct reading is apparently VRSEI. The Birdoswald altar is Hübner, C.I.L. vii, 1348 = Bruce, 379; reading DIII LATI (? = DAII, *dae* for *deae*).—R. G. C.]