

ART. XV.—*Roman Kirkby Thore and an African Inscription.* By ERIC BIRLEY, M.A., F.S.A.

WHEN the literary sources for the place-names of Roman Britain differ, it is not often that an inscription gives the casting vote. But the chance find of an altar at Chesterholm, twenty years ago, showed that the Ravenna list retains the correct spelling of that fort's name—*Vindolanda*—rather than the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which gives the form *Vindolana*. In the case of another British fort, the reading of the *Notitia* is confirmed by an inscription, against variant readings in Ravennas and the Antonine Itineraries. In *Iter II*, *Brovonacis* has been identified with certainty as the modern Kirkby Thore; and it is agreed that *Braboniacum* of the *Notitia*, and *Ravonia* of the Ravenna list, represent the same site. English writers, since the distinction between this name (whatever its proper spelling) and that of Roman Brougham—*Brocavum*—has been recognized, have generally accepted the form given in the *Iter*, presumably because it is based on the earliest documents; and Kirkby Thore appears as *Brovonacae* in the Ordnance Survey map of Roman Britain. But there is an African inscription, that appears to have escaped the notice of English writers hitherto, that shows the reading of the *Notitia* in this instance to be more correct. The inscription, C.I.L. VIII 4800, comes from Gadiaufala (the modern Ksar Sbai) in Numidia:

D M M | P LIC AGATO | PVS VETERAN | VS PRAEFECTVS
 | IN BRITANIA EQ | ALARIS MILITA | NS BRAVNIACO |
 DISMISSVS | REPETENS GADI | AVFALA PAT[riae] |
 SVAE VIX[it ann] | LXXXI[] | FILI IPS P LI[ci] |
 IANVRIVS [. . .]

It is the funeral monument of Publius Licinius Agathopus, who at the age of eighty-two, -three, or -four, died in his native town of Gadiaufala, whither he had returned after a period of military service in Britain. Unfortunately, the sons who had the monument erected expressed themselves in language which makes it a matter of some difficulty to discover the exact nature of that service; we have not only bad spelling, but also unusual use of words, to interpret.

In the first place, let us consider that part of the inscription which concerns Kirkby Thore: Agathopus has been *praefectus in Britannia eq(uitibus) alar(i)is, militans Brauniaco*: "commander in Britain of a cavalry regiment" (the meaning of the terms used is discussed in detail below) "serving at Brauniacum." *Brauniacum* is clearly the same (as Mommsen, the editor of this part of C.I.L. VIII, observed) as *Braboniacum* of the Notitia; *v* and *b* are often interchangeable, and the slurring of the first two syllables into one is not difficult. Mr. I. A. Richmond points out that the Gaelic *braonach* ("a muddy place") must represent the same name; and in the marshy flats that surround three sides of the low plateau that is crowned by the Roman fort, we may recognise the justification for it.

Kirkby Thore has yielded few inscriptions, and on none of them is the name of a regiment preserved; but a fragment, now lost, recorded a dedication by one Aurelius Marcus, *dec(urio) alae*:* so that the site itself has produced a record of what its strategic position indeed requires—a cavalry garrison; and the evidence of the African inscription is confirmed. It is unfortunate that neither stone is closely dateable; on the whole, the fact of the *nomen Aurelius* having been written out in full in the one, suggests a date before, as the abbreviation *Lic* in the other suggests a date after, about A.D. 200; but it would be unwise to place any great reliance on such a dating.

* EE VII 955.

The question of the command that Agathopus held is a difficult one to answer, owing to the unusual phraseology. Mommsen noted:

“ Qui scripsit haec, a consuetudine plane recessit. *Veteranus praefectus equitibus alariis* secundum usum legitimum magis dicendus fuit *praepositus alae*, cum de praefecto alae sensu legitimo nullo modo cogitari possit, quippe cui veterani nomen non recte datur. Item veteranum aliquamdiu retentum sub vexillo postea dimitti (id enim voluit scribens *dismissus*) recte quidem procedit, sed dimissio post missionem nusquam praeterea enuntiatur.”

That is to say, he assumed that Agathopus was merely a veteran soldier retained in the service, and placed in acting command of a cavalry regiment for a time. There are a number of instances of veterans being appointed to the command of regiments, but in no other case known to me is a veteran given command over an *ala*. That is a senior command, held in most cases by a man of equestrian rank, who has previously served in command of an infantry cohort, and subsequently as tribune in a legion; occasionally, it is true, we find a *primipilaris* given the appointment,* but he is of the same standing as the equestrian prefect—indeed, he already possesses equestrian status—and like him is eligible for promotion to a sexagenary procuratorship.† The command of a cohort, on the other hand, might be (and often was) entrusted to a former legionary centurion,‡ or even to a veteran private§ (no doubt, one who as a *principalis* had already served in a

* For example, C. Valerius Clemens, who commanded the *ala Gaetulorum* in the Jewish war under Vespasian: ILS 2544.

† Cf. Domaszewski, *Rangordnung*, p. 141 f.

‡ E.g. CIL VII 371 (Maryport); CIL IX 2564 (dated A.D. 75); AE 1902 n. 41 (an unusually detailed record of a career, that is worth quoting: *Q. Etuvius Sex. f. Vol. Capreolus domo Vienna miles leg. IIII Scyt. ann. IIII eques ann. X cent. ann. XXI praef. coh. II Thrac. in Germ. ann. V vixit ann. LX. . . .*)

§ E.g., ILS 7173.

position of some responsibility). It seems probable, therefore, that this inscription should be interpreted rather differently, taking *veteranus* as adjective, *praefectus* (in its common sense) as noun, and the two words in conjunction as meaning "ex-prefect." *Eq(uites) alar(i)i* will clearly do as the equivalent of *ala*; though it might perhaps conceal a reference to a less permanent unit, formed of detachments drawn from a number of *alae*, similar to the *vexillatio equitum Illyricorum* that ultimately became stabilized as an *ala* of the Dacian garrison.* *Dismissus*, then, must be interpreted as describing the completion of his period of command,† rather than the technical *honesta missio* accorded to private soldiers after they had served their term of twenty-five years. It may be noted that this explanation gets over a difficulty that would otherwise have to be faced—that there is no mention of the main service, presumably in a legion, that Mommsen's interpretation assumes. We may take it, then, that the sense of the text is to this effect: "Sacred to the memory of Publius Licinius Agathopus, some time prefect of cavalry in Britain, stationed at Brauniacum, who on the completion of his service returned to Gadiaufala, his native place."

No doubt, the eighth volume of the *Corpus* contains other treasures also, that British antiquaries would find of value; from Africa come for example most of the epigraphic texts referring to the division of Britain into two provinces in the third century; it is only because the volume still lacks an index, I think, that Agathopus has not been restored before now to his place in the records of Roman Kirkby Thore.

* Cf. Cheesman, *Auxilia*, p. 157.

† Cf. Mitteis-Wilcken, *Papyruskunde* I ii n. 464.