

ART. V.—*Some Roman military inscriptions.* By ERIC BIRLEY, F.S.A.

IN the following notes I discuss the history, the interpretation or both, of some Roman inscriptions found in our district many years ago, the significance of which has not been generally understood. My occasion for a fresh examination of the first of them has been the discovery and excavation of a temple of Mithras, a stone's throw from the Wall-fort at Carrawburgh in Northumberland; in it were three fine altars, each dedicated by a different prefect of *cohors I Batavorum*, the third-century garrison of *Procolitia*: while preparing a note on the prefects and their altars, for incorporation in the report on the excavation,¹ I was led to survey the evidence, from other sites in the Wall area, for the worship of Mithras, and it soon became clear that the source of this particular altar required reconsideration. The second and third inscriptions are of interest, partly for the study of the Roman army as a whole, partly because of the circumstances of their original discovery, which throw some light on the structural history of Castlesteads fort (in one case) and of the Wall itself (in the other).²

§ I. C.83I. This altar was first recorded, with other stones at Naworth, by an unknown correspondent of Camden's (cf. Haverfield in CW2 xi 376), who gave a tolerably complete reading of it; by Horsley's day, it was largely illegible (*Brit. Rom.*, 1732, p. 255 and Cumberland xv), so that he may be pardoned for suspecting that it had been set up by a commander of *coh. I Aelia Dacorum* and that it came, like so many of the

¹ AA4 xxix ff.

² C. followed by a number refers to *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VII; the other abbreviations will all, I hope, be readily intelligible.

Naworth inscriptions, from Birdoswald. In due course it was moved to Rokeby, where Bruce examined it (*Lap. Sep.* 372) but was unable to make out much more of the text than Horsley had deciphered. But the reading provided by Camden's correspondent can be used as the basis for a perfectly satisfactory text: *deo Soli / invicto / M[ith]r[a]e, M[ar] / cus Liciniu[s] / Ripanus / praef-(ectus) v(otum) s(olvit)*.—"To the unconquered Sun-god Mithras, Marcus Licinius Ripanus, prefect, has fulfilled a vow." Traces of the first, fifth and last letters of *Mithrae* may be noted in the unknown's sketch as reproduced by Huebner, and the reading *Liciniu[s]* is confirmed by Haverfield, who examined the MS. (CW2 xi 376, footnote). The crux is the dedicator's rank; for *coh. I Aelia Dacorum* was regularly commanded by tribunes, though it could on occasions have a legionary centurion as its interim commander: a prefect would be wholly out of place at Birdoswald. It must therefore be asked whether there is any other fort from which the altar might have been brought to Naworth—and Castlesteads seems the obvious answer: as the crow flies, it is barely half as far from Naworth as Birdoswald, and Castlesteads has already produced two dedications to Mithras, one a mere fragment (C.890), the other likewise dedicated by a prefect who does not mention his cohort (C.889): [*deo*] *Soli [i]nvicto, Sex. Severius Salvator [pr]aef. [v. s.] l. m.*—"To the unconquered Sun-god, Sextus Severius Salvator, prefect, has gladly and deservedly fulfilled a vow." Both prefects may be assigned with some confidence to *coh. II Tungrorum*, the third-century garrison of Castlesteads, and both altars no doubt come from the same Mithraeum, though one of them seems to have been re-used in some later building: for C.889 is recorded as having been dug up "in the ruins of an old stone-wall".³

³ Gibson's Camden, 1695 ed., p. 844, among the additional material for which acknowledgements are made, in the introduction, to Dr Hugh Todd, prebendary of Carlisle; it was then at Scaleby castle, but its attribution to Castlesteads (then known as Cambeck) is definite.

§ 2. C.887 = ILS 4788 (Castlesteads). This altar was first published by Horsley (*Brit. Rom.*, p. 262 and Cumberland xxxiv), who saw it "at the *Cliff* near *Kirk-linton*, the seat of the late Mr *Appleby*"; it had been moved thence to Netherby by 1772, when Pennant saw it there (*A tour in Scotland &c.*, 2nd ed., 1776, p. 81), and from Netherby it came to Tullie House, Carlisle, where it still is (CW1 xv 474 f., *Tullie House Catalogue* p. 13 no. 33). Horsley noted it as a recent find at the fort now known as Castlesteads, "dug up near the east⁴ entry of the station, and seemed to be in the south jamb of the gate with the face downward"—that is to say, it had been re-used as a flagstone in a Roman repair of the east gate. The reading of the text is clear, but in one place its interpretation calls for reconsideration: *M[at]ribus omnium gentium templum olim vetustate conlabsum G. Iul. Cupitianus (centurio) p. p. restituit.* It records the restoration of a temple to the Mothers of all peoples, which had previously fallen down through old age, by a centurion named Gaius Julius Cupitianus; the abbreviation *p.p.* which follows the centurial sign has previously been taken to mean *primus pilus* or *primipilaris*, making the dedicator either chief centurion or former chief centurion of a legion: but it was not the custom to use the centurial sign in conjunction with either title. We must therefore expand it as *praepositus*, making Cupitianus an ordinary centurion, no doubt seconded from one of the three legions in Britain to take interim charge of the cohort at Castlesteads; in style, the text best fits the first half of the third century, so that the unit in question was no doubt *coh. II Tungrorum*—and the repair at the east gate will have been effected under Diocletian at earliest. For the Mother Goddesses, Haverfield's paper in AA2 xv 314-339 may still be consulted with profit; legionaries in particular worshipped them assiduously, often adding an epithet showing which

⁴ Not *west*, as given by Haverfield and Collingwood.

countries the goddesses, and their worshippers, belonged to; in this case, the dedicator presumably had in mind the Mothers of all the peoples who had provided recruits for the Roman army in Britain.

§ 3. C.914 = ILS 4724. This altar was found in February 1804, between Tarraby and Stanwix, by some labourers "digging a drain across the foundation of the Roman wall", and it is recorded that "The ends of the altar rested on two stones, and the inscription was downwards, and a cavity below it."⁵ From this account it seems clear that the stone had been re-used as the cover for a culvert through the Wall, and the find-spot has no necessary bearing on its original position. The reading of the text is clear, though its interpretation is not certain at one point, and its significance deserves a brief discussion: *Mari(i) Coc(idio) m(ilites) leg(ionis) II Aug(ustae) 7 Sanctiana 7 Secundini d. sol. sub cura Aeliani 7, cura(vit) Oppius Felix optio*. It is a dedication to the North Cumbrian god Cocidius, here equated (as not infrequently) with Mars, by soldiers of the second legion, members of two different centuries of that legion and under the charge of a centurion from another century, and the erection of the altar has been superintended by an *optio*, the tactical second-in-command of a century. The uncertainty lies in the interpretation of *d. sol.*; Huebner, in *Ephemeris Epigraphica* III, p. 136, noted Buecheler's suggestion of *d(omo) Sol(venses)*, implying that the dedicators came from Solva in Noricum. That is not impossible; an altar from Castlecary on the Antonine Wall (C.1095) records *cives Italici et Norici* serving in the sixth legion, showing that there were Norican legionaries in Britain in the second century (to which, on general grounds, the present altar seems best assignable); and we may compare an altar from Birrens in Dumfriesshire, set up by *c(ives) Raeti milit(antes) in coh. II Tungr.* (C.1068), as a

⁵ AA1 i, Appendix, p. 4; the first publication was in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1804, p. 471. The altar is now at Lowther Castle.

corporate dedication by men hailing from the same province. But if we accept that reading, the dedication is left without an operative verb, and I am inclined to think that we must expand the second word as *sol(verunt)*—"fulfilled (a vow)": the first word was perhaps *d(ono)*—"by gift (sc. of the altar)".

A second point for consideration is the difference in rendering of the centuries' names. It should be a commonplace that in most cases the centurial mark is followed by a name in the genitive, as here in the case of ·7 *Secundini*—"century of Secundinus". But on occasions we find, instead, an adjectival form, as here 7 *Sanctiana*; its significance does not seem to be generally understood, and indeed I have nowhere found it noted: but a little consideration will show what it was. The clearest clue is provided by an inscription from Rome, where the adjectival form is used for a *turma* of the *equites singulares*⁶ (for this regiment, cf. my observations in PSAScot. lxx, 1936, 374 f.): *d. m. T. Aurelio Mansuetino eq. sing. Aug. tur. Lucaniana, nat. Noricus, vix. an. XXV, mil. annis VII, P. Aelius Lucanus 7 leg. VII G. her(es) fac(iendum) cur(avit)*. This is the tombstone of a man from Noricum who had served in the Emperor's cavalry regiment of the guard, set up by his heir, Publius Aelius Lucanus, centurion of *leg. VII Gemina*, the one legion of Hither Spain; and when we ask how a centurion of that legion came to be the heir of a trooper in the regiment at Rome, the designation of the man's troop, as *turma Lucaniana*, gives the show away: Lucanus had been his troop commander when the will was drawn up, but had been promoted centurion and posted to Spain before taking up his inheritance.⁷ The adjectival form, therefore, is used of a former commander—and, in normal circumstances, will only have been used for as

⁶ CIL VI 3211.

⁷ VI 3176 = ILS 2199 is the tombstone of another member of the same troop, described as *turm. Aeli Lucani*; it belongs, therefore, to the period before the promotion of Lucanus to the centurionate.

long as a new commander remained to be appointed; in the present case, Sanctus was the last commander of the first century and Secundinus was the present commander of the second, and a detachment drawn from both centuries was performing some task under a third centurion, Aelianus.

This is not the only example of the adjectival form, applied to centuries, found in our district; there are also *l. II Aug. 7 Volusiana* from the Naworth collection (C.841), *coh. IIII [7] Probian(a)* (C.848) and *7 Hortensiana* (C.859) from between Birdoswald fort and mile-castle 50.

Aelianus and his detachment were presumably engaged in a repair to the Wall, such as is attested by an inscription from Irthington (*Eph. Epigr. IX 1217*): *vexil(l)atio leg. II Aug. refecit*; it is precisely in a vexillation that we should expect to find men from different centuries grouped together under a single centurion.