



NOTES ON THE TOMBSTONE OF
M. AURELIUS ALEXANDER, IN
CHESTER.

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(Read 24th March, 1890.)

THIS inscription is incised within a dovetail ansated panel on a block of stone, about one foot eleven inches in height by three feet two inches in width. The subjoined lettering is from a good paper squeeze carefully impressed on the original stone, and kindly forwarded to me by Mr. G. W. Shrubsole.

D	M
M·AVRELIV	///·ALEXAND
PRAE	////////CAST·LEG·XX
///·NAT·	////////RV////////C ^c ////
///·AN·LXXII	//////////
////////ICES·ET·S	//////////

Although the lower margin is entirely destroyed, one may easily perceive that the inscription never had more than the six lines still visible, and of which the three last ones have been much damaged at both ends; besides,



TOMBSTONE OF M. AURELIUS ALEXANDER, FOUND IN THE
NORTH WALL OF THE CITY OF CHESTER.

several letters in the middle remaining parts have weathered away. Those of the upper lines may be restored in such a manner that we may safely depend on the reading,

*D(iis) M(anibus) . M(arcus) Aureliu[s] Alexand(er),
prae[f](ectus) cast(rorum) leg(ionis) vigesima(e).*

The destroyed lettering is enclosed within square brackets, the expanded lettering within parentheses.

At the beginning of the fourth line, the gap was certainly filled with the letters, now lost, V . V, *V(aleriae) V(ictricis)*, the usual denomination of the Twentieth Legion. Next comes the lettering NAT, the well-known abbreviation of *nat(ione)*, which does not answer to our word "nation," but means "by birth;" it was applicable to foreigners originating from any part of the empire, except Rome and Italy, and followed by an ethnical qualification. Consequently, the word [*Et*]RVSC[us] is not to be thought of, the more so as the Etruscans existed no longer, in the sense of a political body, after the year 221 B.C. This leaves us no other choice for an ethnical qualification but [*Sy*]RVS or [*Su*]RVS, according to the Greek or the Latin orthography; it must be observed that this word is but a generic term, for Syria comprised many nations; hence one meets frequently with denominations such as *Syrus Caesariensis*, *Syrus Garasenus*, *Syrus natione Arabus*, and this leads us to suppose that the two letters following [*Sy*]RVS in the inscription are the beginning of some Syrian people's name. Of these letters, the first is a round figure, which has lost its right portion, and may be read either O or C; the latter has lost its lower part, and by its size gives more the idea of the top of an S than of an O. The two letters would then be either CO or OS, and the whole word would be restored thus, CO[*mmag(enus)*] or OS[*roen(us)*]. I leave this point to be decided by the antiquaries of Chester, who have the opportunity of ascertaining which is the most suitable reading on

the stone. All this agrees well with the cognominal name Alexander, which tells us plainly that its owner originated from the eastern parts of the empire, where the current language was Greek; whilst his prenomen and gentilicial name show that the Roman citizenship had been bestowed on him by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius or by his son Commodus, or, more likely, by Caracalla.

At the beginning of the fifth line, the words AN(*nis*) LXXII were necessarily preceded by [VIX](*it*), and perhaps followed by a complementary number of months and days.

After the age of the deceased, we expect to find in the sixth line the names of the persons who erected the memorial. The first one ends with the letters ICES, for which [*Polyn*]ICES seems to be adapted most conveniently; this name, although rare in epigraphics, is exemplified by an inscription in Rome,¹ commemorating the circensian feats of a notorious chariot-driver, M. Aurelius Polynices, bearing the same prænomen and gentilicial name, M. Aurelius; this shows that he was the freed man of a master similarly denominated, whom I suppose to be the very M. Aurelius Alexander here commemorated.

As for the other person who contributed to the funeral monument, we are at a loss to fill up the name, which has only left its initial letter, S; I would suggest one, such as Seleucus, merely for the sake of matching with the other Greek names, Alexander and Polynices. Most likely the line ended with the usual abridged formula, H . F . C, *h(eredes) f(aciendum) c(uraverunt)*.

To sum up, the expansion of the whole inscription would be:—

*D(iis) M(anibus) . M(arcus) Aureliu[s] Alexand(er),
prae[f](ectus) cast(rorum) leg(ionis) vigesima V(aleriae)*

¹ See *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum*, vi. 10049.

v(ictricis), nat(ione) [Sy]ru[s] Os[roenus], [vix(it)] an(nis) duo et septuaginta, [m(ensibus) . . .] ; [Polyn]ices et S[eleucus?], [h(eredes) f(aciendum) c(uraverunt)].

To the Gods of the Dead! Marcus Aurelius Alexander, prefect of the quarters of the Twentieth Legion, surnamed the Valeria Victorious, by birth a Syrian from Osroene, lived seventy-two years, . . . months, . . . days. Polynices and S(eleucus?), his heirs, took the care of erecting this memorial.

The rank and duties of *praefectus castrorum* answered those of the quartermaster-general in our modern armies; they were never conferred but upon a *primipilus*, the title by which the first *centurio* in a legion was distinguished from his fifty-nine colleagues.

Strange to say, visitors to the Vatican Museum may read on a cippus inscribed to a *primipilus* the very same names, M. Aurelius Alexander, and those of his wife, Aurelia Antiochiana, obviously a Syrian woman. The inscription purports that this officer selected, close to his house in Rome, a funeral ground reserved in future for himself, his family, and household. It would then appear that, in consequence of this promotion to the rank of *praefectus castrorum*, he was subsequently ordered to join the Twentieth Legion in Britain, at Deva, where he died and was buried, contrary to his expectations and desire of being interred in the tomb he had prepared in Rome. This curious inscription deserves to be confronted with the Chester memorial; it is here subjoined at full length,¹ without any further remark, save an explanation of the letters V . E, at the end of the first line, which mean *v(ir) e(gregius)*, a qualification to which the *primipilus* was entitled, since his rank gave him admittance to the equestrian order:—

¹ See *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum*, vi. 3554.

D φ

M φ

M φ AVREL . ALEXANDER φ PRIMIPIL φ ET V E φ
 VIVVS . SIBI . ET . VXORI . SVAE φ AVRELIAE
 ANTIOCHIANAE . HVNC φ C E POTAPHIVM
 SEPARAVIT . DE . DOMV ET FECIT . OMNIBVS φ
 SVIS . POSTERISQVE SVIS LIBERTIS φ
 LIBERTABVSQVE . POSTERISQVE φ EORVM φ
 ET . PRAECEPTIT . HEREDIBVS NE QVIS φ
 EXTRANEVM VELLIT . PōNERE . VEL
 VENVM DARE . VEL . FIDuCIARE . VEL φ
 DONVM DARE . VEL VLLO mODO φ ALI
 ENARE φ NAM POST HAEC PrAECEPTA φ
 SI QVIS φ AINVENTVS (*sic*) φ FVERIT φ HOC φ
 FECISSE φ INFERAT φ SACRO . FISCO
 SESTERTIA . CENTVM MILIA NVMMVM

To the Gods of the Dead! Marcus Aurelius Alexander, first-spear centurion, ranking in the Egregious Order¹ (*i.e.* Equestrian), when still living, set this funeral ground apart from his house, for himself, for his wife Aurelia Antiochiana, and for all those belonging to him, for his posterity, for his freedmen and freedwomen and their posterity, and prescribed his heirs to allow no one to build thereupon for any other purpose, or to sell, or to mortgage, or to give, or any other wise alienate this ground. For, after these prescriptions, if any one should be found to have transgressed them, he shall pay to the Sacred (*viz.* imperial) Treasury a fine of a hundred thousand sestertia (*viz.* pennies).

It would also appear that the young M. Aurelius Poly-nices, who was then in Rome with his patron, the *primipilus* Alexander, and allowed by him to perform in the circus, followed him to Britain, where he assisted him in his last moments.

¹ *Vir Egregius* is not a laudative compliment, but an official qualification, the form of which must be preserved in the English translation, as far as possible.

We know the names of a few other *praefecti castrorum* in Britain: *Poenius Postumus, praefectus castrorum secundae legionis*, recorded by Tacitus, *Annal.* xiv. 37, in the year 61; *M. Pompeius Asper, praef. castr. leg. xx. Victr.*, in an inscription published by Orelli, No. 3809; *P. Anicius Maximus, praef. castror. leg. II. Aug. in Britannia*, year 43, in an inscription of Asia Minor, published in the *Ephemeris epigraphica*, v. p. 976; besides the Caerleon inscription, . . . (*tun*)*ius . . . ussus praef. castror.*, and the Tibur inscription, *praef. cast. leg. VI. Victr.* (Gruter, p. 1110, 11).

This inscription to M. Aurelius Alexander, found in the city walls on the 19th of August, 1887, was published for the first time in the *Chester Courant*, on August 24th following, and afterwards by Mr. J. P. Earwaker in his book, *The Recent Discoveries of Roman Remains found in repairing the North Wall of the City of Chester*, 1888, p. 19.

