



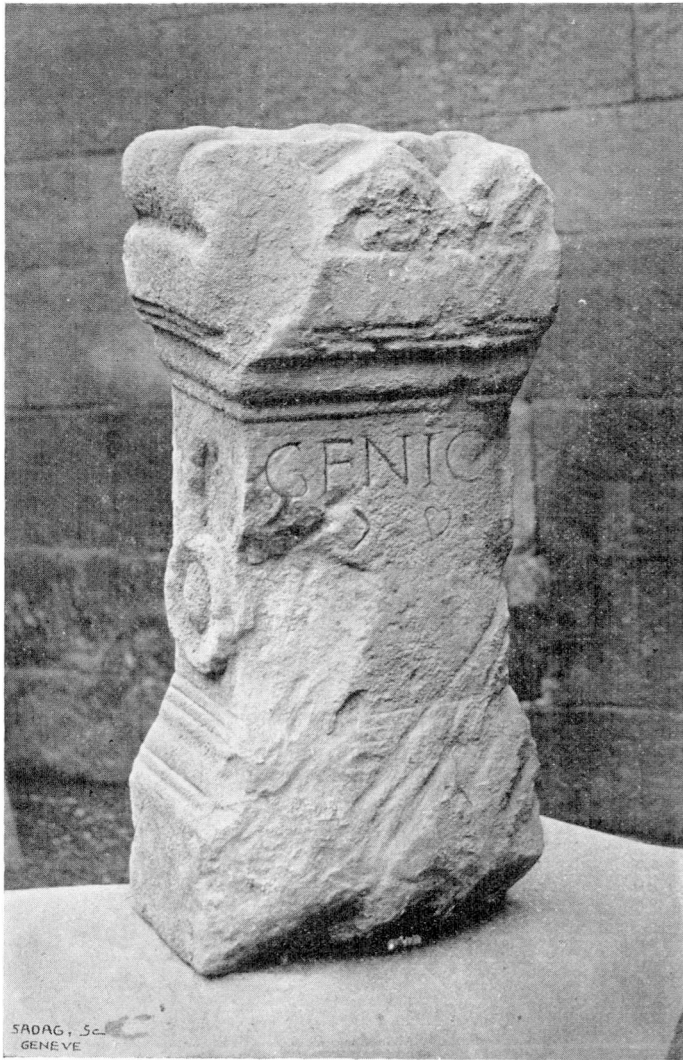
## Roman Altar discovered in 1896

BY F. HAVERFIELD, M.A., F.S.A.

**T**HE latest addition to the collection of Roman inscriptions in the Grosvenor Museum is a red sandstone altar, 30 inches in height and 13 inches in width, which, as Mr. Frederick Potts kindly tells me, was found last autumn in digging a cellar for a new building in St. Werburgh Street, Chester, about halfway from the Cathedral to East-gate Street. The altar lay about 8 feet below the surface of the street in "made" ground, and upon its face; that is, it was not *in situ*. Indeed, the presence of some hard mortar adhering to it, suggests that it had at some time been used as building material, and afterwards thrown away. It came into the possession of Mr. Potts, who has lent it to our Society, and it is now in the Grosvenor Museum. I was able to examine it there in January, 1897. The inscription now legible, in letters  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches high, is—

GENIC  
} ♡

that is, *genio centuriae*, followed by a leaf-stop; and I think that this is all that was ever written on the stone. On the spectator's left-hand side is carved a "patena," with a more ornamented handle than is usual; on the right-hand side is a jug. On the back is a sort of zigzag ornamentation.



**Roman Altar found in Chester in 1896.**  
(Photographed by Mr. R. NEWSTEAD, F.E.S.)



The Romans were accustomed to worship the *genius* of almost every person and thing and place. "*Genium*," says a late Roman writer, "*dicebant antiqui naturalem deum uniuscuiusque loci vel rei aut hominis.*" The "Genius Publicus" and the "Genius Augusti" were worshipped on fixed days in the Roman calendar, and, with slight modifications in title, were commemorated on countless coins and inscriptions. This worship of the *genius* formed part of the official religion of the Roman army; that is, of the religion which was recognised officially inside the camp, and which centred round the shrine in which the legionary eagle was kept. Hence we find inscriptions, on stone or on coins, to the genius of the army, or of the legion, the auxiliary cohort or *ala*. Similarly we meet with the genius of the camp, or of the *prætorium*, or even in one case the genius of the granary, where the provisions, &c., were stored. The most important division of the legion, for purposes of organization, was the century, and, accordingly, beside the genius of the legion we find the genius of the century.<sup>1</sup> This genius appears on our new Chester stone, and on one, perhaps on two, stones previously in the Grosvenor Museum. A finely preserved altar, dug up in 1861 in Eastgate Street, about 100 yards from the new find, is inscribed "*Genio sancto centuriæ Aelius Claudian(us) opt(io) v. s.*" Another, of more doubtful contents, is perhaps inscribed "*Genio > A. Verin. Quintilianus*"; that is, "to the Genius of the Century of Aurelius Verinus, erected by Julius Quintilianus." Such altars were erected by the officers of the century; that is, by the standard-bearers, the *optiones*, and the *tesserarii*, but not by the centurions, who were, in a sense, officers of the whole legion. The place of erection

<sup>1</sup> Domaszewski, *die Religion des römischen Heeres*, p. 103.

was probably some shrine (*aedicula*) in the buildings set apart for the century in question.

It may be convenient to add a word about the second of the two inscriptions just mentioned. This, a small sandstone altar found in 1849, in Boughton—that is, outside the Roman walls of Deva—has usually been considered as a dedication *Genio Averni*. This, however, is an extraordinary dedication, despite the old Roman proverb, “*nullus locus sine genio*”; and it could be excused only by the presence at Boughton of some peculiarly deadly or dreadful chasm or cavern, which might be called an Avernus. Of such a place there is no vestige; and, even if such had existed, I doubt if it would have been commemorated by a dedication *Genio Averni*. It is more probable that the lettering has been misunderstood. The second line, supposed to be *Averni*, is very faint. Before the “A” there is a mark which has been taken by two or three scholars as a centurial mark, while the whole line appears to be—

Λ V R I A

This could be read *Averni*, but it could also be read *Averin*, which, as Prof. Hübner has observed in a letter to me, makes *A. Verin(i)*. As, however, the centurial mark is uncertain, this reading must not be taken as certain.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See this *Journal* iii. 125 (where Prof. Hübner reads *Aurini*, which is impossible), and my *Roman Inscriptions* ii. p. 34. The inscription has been published in the *Corpus Inscr. Lat.* vii. 165, and in the late Mr. W. T. Watkin's *Roman Cheshire*, p. 177. Mr. Watkin's theories are, I am afraid, somewhat fanciful.