

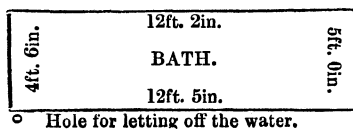
No. II.—*Observations on Five Roman Altars, found in the Summer of 1844, at Rutchester, the ancient Vindobala, and the Fourth Station “per Lineam Valli.” In Letters from Mr. JOHN BELL and Mr. THOMAS HODGSON, to JOHN ADAMSON, Esq., F. S. A., &c., Secretary.*

FROM MR. BELL TO MR. ADAMSON.

Newcastle, January 8, 1845.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING heard that Mr. John Stephenson, the tenant of Thomas James, Esq., at Rutchester, in the parish of Ovingham, in searching for walling stones in the uneven ground near to his house, caused by the fallen works, &c., of the Roman Station, Vindobala (the fourth station on the Wall), had discovered some Roman altars, I visited Mr. Stephenson on the 3d December; and learnt that in August last, in working stones out of a mound of earth about 200 yards west of his house, and on the outside of what had been the walls of the station, his workmen discovered five altars, three of them quite perfect; these by Mr. James's desire he had removed to Otterburn Castle on the 14th of the preceeding month, but two others remained there, which I saw and took rubbings of. On the 9th December I went to Otterburn Castle, and took rubbings from the three altars which had been removed there (*see pl. 1, figs. 1, 2, 3*); and received Mr. James's permission to remove to the Antiquarian Society the two altars which had been left at Rutchester, and which arrived here on the 18th of the same month (*see pl. 1, figs. 4, 5*). Whilst at Rutchester I saw on the south side of the station, cut out of the solid rock what had been a Roman bath, of the following dimensions:—



o Hole for letting off the water.

I have no doubt but if search was made amongst the stones, with which the dry walls of the small enclosures round the house are built, inscribed or other carved stones might be found.

I am, dear Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN BELL.

FROM MR. HODGSON TO MR. ADAMSON.

Newcastle, March 3, 1845.

DEAR SIR,

I HAD the pleasure a few weeks ago of receiving, from our friend Mr. Bell, tracings of his drawings of the altars found last summer at Rutchester, accompanied with a request that I would give some account of them. With that request it is not easy to comply; for they are exceedingly curious, and some of them are unique, at least I have not been able to find anything similar to them in any book in my power to consult. But I feel little hesitation in asserting, that they are all alike in character. They have not reference, however, to the ordinary mythology of Greece or Rome. They are more eastern and mythic; they refer, in fact, to the Sun and Fire worship of Persia. I do not pretend to possess such learning as to enable me to give you a full explanation of their meaning, or of the mythology to which they refer; but after the elaborate and able communication by your former respected colleague, the Rev. J. Hodgson, published in the first volume of our Transactions,* relating to the Mithraic antiquities found at Housesteads, I do not consider it necessary. It will be sufficient, perhaps, if I furnish you with such reasons as will induce you to conclude that they belong to the same class. The inscriptions, on the principal altars, numbered 1, 2, and 3, are so distinct as to present little difficulty in respect to the reading of them; the inscription, on that numbered 4, is un-

* *Archæologia Æliana*, vol. i., p. 263.

RUDCHESTER ALTARS.

Fig. 2 Top

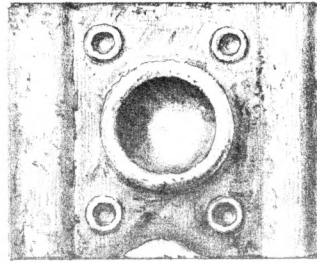
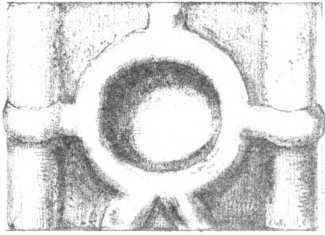


Fig. 3 Top



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Fig. 1

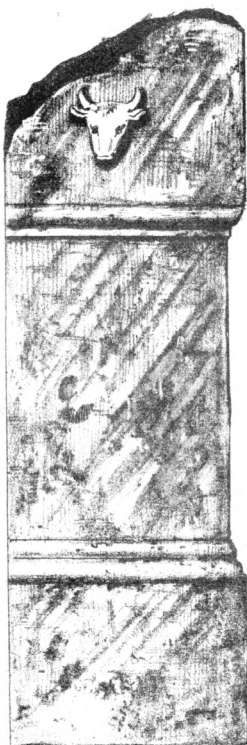


Fig. 5



Drawn to 1/2 of the Original Size.



fortunately imperfect, which is much to be regretted, as it is very singular, and it would have been very desirable to know its full import. I shall endeavour to explain them, and it will afford me much pleasure to find that my remarks have proved satisfactory. I shall begin with the most difficult, namely:—

Fig. 1.—This was first communicated to me in the August of last year by my friend, Mr. Thomas Jefferson, of Hexham. It was so different from any thing I had ever met with, or could find, and remembering the strange altar we have (also found at Rutchester), bearing the monogram, which has been by many supposed to be that of Christ, I told him that I thought it must be Christian, as for instance to “*Deo Aeterno.*”^{*} You may remember, that I stated much the same thing to you, when you communicated to me, not only this altar, but also those numbered 2 and 3. On carefully and jointly considering them, however, and having learnt from you that they were all found together, I afterwards told you, that “I considered them all as similar in character, and that I was also most certain that the rude figures on the base of this altar were intended to represent Mithras and his bull.” The large drawings, or rubbings, of Mr. Bell have since convinced me, that I was perfectly correct in this opinion. There can be no doubt that the animal was meant to represent a bull; and though its head is turned the contrary way to that which is usually seen in sculptures relating to Mithras, yet there are other instances of such position, and it is evident that the figure, though on the left side, is still striking the bull on the right, as the sculptures relating to Mithras usually represent.—*See fig. 1.* These figures, are, I think, sufficient to prove that the deity, to whom the altar was dedicated, was in reality Mithras. If any doubt, however, could be entertained, that, in my opinion, would be completely removed by the sculpture, on the right side of the head, or capital, of the altar, representing a bull’s face.—*See fig. 1, a.* An exact counterpart of this is shewn near the tree in the large Mithraic tablet, introduced (from Dupuis) by Mr. Hodgson in his communication relating to

^{*} Professor Orell, in his *Inscriptionum Latinarum Collectio*, gives two inscriptions—No. 2140, *Deo Aeterno*, and 2141, *Deo Magno Aeterno*,—but adds, that he is of the same opinion as Hagenbuch that these are not Christian, but heathen.

the Housesteads antiquities before alluded to, and also in his *History of Northumberland*.* This is undoubtedly symbolical of Mithras; and a further proof of this altar's Mithraic dedication, may, probably, be found in the circular shaped figure on the front of the capital which seems to have been meant to represent the Sun.

The circular wreath, or whatever it may be, long perplexed me, though always of opinion, that it was symbolical of some attribute of the deity to whom the altar was dedicated. After our Anniversary Meeting, it struck me, that it could be meant for no other than the sacred zone, or bandage, represented in sculptures as encircling the bodies of many Persian and some Egyptian gods. A reference to the volumes of Montfaucon, Bryant, and others, fully confirmed me in this opinion, and I trust, that what I am about to state will induce you to agree with me.

If you consult the first volume of Bryant's *Mythology*, you will find him, in controverting an opinion advanced by Hyde,† that certain sculptured rocks and caverns in Persia were either palaces or tombs, and contending on the contrary that they were temples (of Mithras), thus describing them:— "In the front of these grottos are representations of various characters; and among others is figured, more than once, a princely personage, who is approaching an altar where the sacred fire is burning. Above all is the Sun, and the figure of a deity in a cloud, with sometimes a sacred bandage, at other times a serpent, entwined round his middle, similar to the Cnuphis of Egypt."‡

In the second volume of Montfaucon, and also in the first and second volumes of Bryant's *Mythology*,|| you will find representations of some of the sculptured rock-temples alluded to; and the several references, given in the note below,§ will lead you to other figures of Persian gods, in other situations, and all except one encircled by this sacred bandage. To this extraordinary figure, which you will find in the second volume of Bryant's

* *Archæologia Æliana*, vol. i. p. 285. *History of Northumberland*, vol. iii. part ii. p. 193. See also Montfaucon, vol. i. pl. 96, fig. 4.

† *Religio veterum Persarum*, c. 23, p. 306.

‡ *Analysis of ancient Mythology*, vol. i. p. 276; third edition.

|| Montfaucon's *Antiquity Explained*, vol. ii. pl. 54, fig. 28, and pl. 56, fig. 2. Bryant, vol. i. pl. 2 and 5; vol. ii. pl. 12. See also Porter's *Travels in Georgia, &c.*, vol. i. pl. 17.

§ Bryant, vol. ii. pl. 8 and 11. Porter's *Travels in Georgia*, vol. i. pl. 48 and 50; vol. ii. pl. 60.

Mythology, pl. 8, I wish to draw your particular attention. You will observe that it represents a deity, with the middle part of his body placed behind, or apparently formed of, a vertical winged circle, with two side pendants, and a conical shaped one under the centre of the circle, as if enclosing the lower extremities of the deity. The circle and its pendants, have a strong general resemblance to those upon this altar.

What was the real signification of this bandage, it is, not for me to undertake to say. That it had, however, reference to time may, I think, be safely assumed from its general resemblance to those figures, which have been ever regarded as symbols of eternity. A more precise explanation may probably be found in the following passage extracted from the second volume of Bryant's *Mythology*, where speaking of the Zoni, he says,—

“All the vestments of the priests, and those in which they used to apparel their deities, had sacred names taken from terms in their worship. Such were Camise, Candys, Cidaris, Mitra, Zona, and the like. The last was a sacred fillet, or girdle, which they esteemed an emblem of the orbit described by Zon, the Sun. They either represented their gods as girded round with a serpent, which was an emblem of the same meaning, or else with this bandage named Zona.”*

I trust that the explanations I have thus attempted to give will induce you to come to the same conclusions as I have done,—that this altar was in reality dedicated to Mithras, and that the wreath was symbolical of some of his attributes.† If a conjecture might be hazarded on this latter point, I would certainly say, that it appears most probable, that it was under his attribute of *Sacularis*—“the Lord of Ages,” as it has been translated by Mr. Hodgson,—the ruler of the year and of time.

The question, however, still remains—why was the name of the deity

* Bryant's *Mythology*, vol. ii. p. 408.

† If I am right, we may, perhaps, hence derive the true meaning of that ornament on the back of one of the altars found in Beltingham Chapel Yard, and which Mr. Hodgson, in his *History of Northumberland*, (pt. ii. vol. iii p. 199), says “is no doubt the sign of Taurus inverted.” It is, I think much more probable that it was meant to represent the sacred bandage. This conjecture is strengthened, in my opinion, by the letters D.M., in the first line of this altar, which I entertain no doubt were meant for *Deo Mitrae*, and not *Dis Manibus*. I am further inclined to think, that the wreath which occurs on the back &c. of some altars, should not be considered as a mere ornament, but as a religious symbol, though it may be now difficult to explain its true signification. See Horsley's *Scor.* No. xv.

omitted? That the different symbols displayed upon this altar were sufficiently significant to the dedicator of it, and to all those initiated in the worship of Mithras, to render it evident to them that it could have been dedicated to no other deity, I can readily comprehend. But the very conspicuous and, I may say, emphatic manner in which the word, "DEO," is inscribed upon the altar, implies to my mind, a degree of supremacy and exclusiveness which is most remarkable, and strikingly illustrative of the veneration in which this deity was held. We are told by Porphyry, as rendered by Mr. Faber,* that Zoroaster consecrated a natural grotto to Mithras, "*the universal father*"—a term which seems to me strongly confirmative of the opinion here advanced. In such a light he was no doubt regarded by the dedicator, who took this decided mode of giving expression to his conviction.

There can be little doubt, I think, that the willow-like branches placed on each side of the wreath were religious symbols—probably emblematic of the wreaths worn, or branches carried in the religious ceremonies. It is, I think, not unworthy of remark that an ornament of this diverging character is extremely common upon altars, and a striking instance is shewn in fig. 2.

There are some strange carvings on the left side of the base, as shewn in fig. 1, b. They seem, to have been meant for daggers; and may have been intended as emblems of the dagger which Mithras is represented as using when stabbing the bull. What the singular projection on the capital on the same side is, I am at a loss to conjecture, as well as to account for the indentions on the front of the capital.

Having stated thus much, I shall not longer dwell upon this singular altar, but proceed to give you the reading, which may, I think, be considered the right one, viz. :—

DEO
L. SENTIUS
CASTUS
LEG. VI. D. P.

Deo (Mitrae saeculari ?)
Lucius Sentiis
Castus
Legionis sextae dedicat piè.

* Dissertation on the Mysteries of the Cabiri, vol. ii. p. 262. Bryant, in noticing this passage, renders the term applied to Mithras, "the creator and father of all things."—*Myth.* vol. i. p. 276.

Fig. 2.—The inscription on this altar is very explicit, and affords no ground for doubting that it had been erected also to Mithras, under the name of *Sol Invictus*, as seen upon many other altars, as for instance, Horsley's NORTH. XCIV. and CUMB. XV. ; but more expressively upon one of the Housesteads altars now in our collection, the dedication of which runs—*Deo Soli invicto Mitrae saeculari*. The letters at the beginning of the second line, I have no doubt, stand for the name, *Tiberius Claudius*—a high sounding name certainly, but yet most probably correct. Exactly the same combination occurs in Horsley's CUMB. LVI., and he does not hesitate to read them as I have proposed, and we cannot follow a better guide. The name which follows these appears to be *Decmus*, but that is a name of which I can find no other instance, and I presume it should be read either *Decimus* or *Decimius*, both of which names have been found in inscriptions ; but on this point I am in some doubt, as the lengthening of the thick strokes of the M seems rather owing to the peculiar formation of the letter, than meant for additional letters. But this is of as little consequence as in the preceding instance. The following names, I have no doubt, may be correctly read *Cornelius Antonius*. On this point I was once doubtful, as it is very unusual to find five names belonging to one individual, but an inspection of the altar satisfied me that CORNEL was a contraction, and that there was a small stroke over the third letter in those following this contraction, so as effectually to remove an opinion I had at one time entertained, that these letters formed one name. The remaining contractions are too plain to admit of doubt, though it may be remarked that the restoration of a temple recorded on an altar is very unusual, but a striking instance of it occurs in Horsley's CUMB. XXXIV. The top of this altar, it will be seen from fig. 2, a. is rendered rather remarkable from having five foci.

This altar seems to require no further remarks ; and the following is the reading which I think should be adopted ;

DEO. SOLINVIC
TIBCLDECMVS
CORNEL ANTO
NIVS. PRAEF
TEMPL. RESTIT

*Deo Soli invicto
Tiberius Claudius Decimus
Cornelius Anto-
nius Praefectus
Templum restituit*

Fig. 3.—Respecting the dedication of this altar there can be no doubt, as it expressly declares, that it was erected as an offering of devotion to Mithras; and the only difficulty attending it is the correct reading of the name at the beginning of the third line, the first letters of which are unfortunately imperfect. From the first rubbings it seemed as if they were T and M, forming with the following letters the strange name, *Tmullus*. A close inspection of the altar itself, however, has convinced me that the second letter is not an M, but what it has been I cannot undertake to say. The first letter I also think very uncertain. But the knowledge of the right name of this Prefect is, in my opinion, not of much consequence; it is only another cognomen added to the long list of uncertain ones, and the correct reading of it would in reality convey no useful information. We may, therefore, well rest satisfied that the remainder of the inscription admits of no doubt. The reading of it, it is certain, is the following:—

DEO INVICTO
MYTRAE P AEL
T::VLLVS PRÆ
V. S. LL M

Deo invicto
Mytrae Publius Aelius
T::ullus Praefectus
Votum solvit libentissime merito.

Fig. 4.—It is much to be regretted that the inscription on this altar is so much defaced. It is very curious, and I believe unique, I can find no such inscription in any book in my power to consult; but certainly no such inscription has ever before been found in this country. You may, perhaps, recollect that, at the late anniversary I expressed my surprise at seeing the name of Apollo upon an altar found in this country. There is only one undoubted instance that I know of, and that is an altar found at Auchindavy, in Scotland, in 1771, in making the Forth and Clyde Canal, and now in the collection at Glasgow. That altar is inscribed DIANAË APOLLINI, so clearly expressed that there can be no doubt upon its dedication. An altar is stated by Camden to have been *heard* of by him at Musselburgh, dedicated, as he says, to *Apollo Grannus*; but I suspect that this was not a Roman deity, and the existence of such an altar seems very doubtful. Dr. Whitaker, in his *History of Whalley*, asserts, that he had also found an inscription to Apollo, *Apollo Aponus*, upon the sculptured stone, mentioned by Pennant, as built up in the wall of the court at

Salisbury Hall, near Ribchester,* and which in 1815 was taken out of the wall, and presented to Dr. Whitaker. He says it proved as he had suspected that the inscription, mentioned by Camden, Horsley, &c.,† and so long lost, was on the back of it, and that it was not as had been supposed SEGESAM, but APOLLINI APOÑO ;‡ but the reverend Doctor does not give a copy of the inscription, so that any opinion might be formed of it, and the account he gives of it is so confused, and he jumps to his conclusions so hastily, that I have no confidence in his account of the inscription. The name of Apollo occurs, as you know, on the tablet in our collection found at Housesteads, and these are all the instances that I believe can be found. I suspect, however, that the Apollo in this inscription must not be considered as the Apollo of the poetical mythology. He is here more mystic in meaning; and, as Sol Apollo, is no other than Mithras. Under these several names I have no doubt the same deity was alluded to and worshiped. The letters at the beginning of the third line are evidently ANIO, the dative case of Anius, who was the son of Apollo and Rhea. Mr. Faber calls the female Rheo and gives the following account of them:—"Staphylus, the son of Bacchus, had a daughter called Rheo who became pregnant by Apollo. Her father, having discovered the illicit commerce, cast her into the sea inclosed within an ark; but she landed safely in Eubea, and entering into a cave, there brought forth her son Anius." He then goes on to say, that "Rheo is the same as Rhea, a mere personification of the Ark; Apollo is the solar Noah; and Anius is also the great patriarch, under the title of *Aniun*, the *naval deity*."§ Such is the mystic explanation given of this story by Mr. Faber, and though his system is considered fanciful by some, and in great part may be so, yet it is extremely plausible, and often accordant with ancient writers and inscriptions. The principle of his system is, to trace the great deities up to Noah and to the Ark, which he says was the Great Mother. They came afterwards to be worshiped as the Sun and Moon.

* Tour to Alston, p. 93.

† See *Britannia Romana*, p. 332.

‡ History of Richmondshire, vol. i. p. 462.

§ "His relationship to Apollo is a mere genealogical repetition."—*Mysteries of the Cabiri*, vol. i. p. 203.

This inscription as far as can be made out must be read, SOLI APOLLINI ANIO; what next follows appears to be ET, but is quite uncertain. The remainder is exceedingly doubtful. Had the letters, I O M, stood at the head, there could be no doubt that they should be read *Jovi optimo maximo*; but being placed in an inferior position makes me rather doubt that they should be so read. I know not, however, what else to make of them, and I can only account for their position, by supposing that the initiated person, who erected the altar, after inscribing the names of the chief god, which he had learnt in the mysteries, added that name which had been familiar to him in his youth and in his native country. The remaining letters are unintelligible.

Fig. 5.—This small altar is uninscribed, at least the inscription, if there ever were one, is now completely effaced. It is only rendered remarkable by the singular circumstance of its having been fixed in a large flat stone, by a sort of rude mortice and tenon, for the purpose, I presume, of giving it steadiness. It is, perhaps, worthy of remark, that an altar about the same size was found, along with the larger altars to Mithras, at Houseteads.

Respecting the date of these inscriptions we are left almost entirely to conjecture. The worship of Mythras was introduced about the middle of the second century, and one of the Housesteads inscriptions shews that it prevailed there in the year 253. From the shape of the letters, however, I do not think that these inscriptions can be considered of so late a date, but some time nearer the reign of Caracalla. They cannot, I think, be later than the close of Alexander Severus's reign about 230.

Respecting the troops, of which these Prefects were the commanders, I can give no opinion, further than that they must have been cavalry. According to the Notitia, however, it was an infantry cohort that was stationed at Vindobala, so that no information can be derived from this source.

I hope the preceding remarks may be considered satisfactory; commending them to your candid consideration,

I remain, dear Sir, your obedient Servant,

THOMAS HODGSON.