

ON A VOTIVE TABLET, WITH INSCRIPTION, RECENTLY  
FOUND AT BINCHESTER.

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IN February last I had the pleasure of bringing before the Society the discoveries which had been made by Mr. Proud, of Bishop Auckland, at Binchester, the ancient Vinovium. Mr. Proud's researches have been continued since that time, and fuller results have been obtained. It will give me pleasure, at some future time, before the paper I read in February last is printed in the Transactions of the Society, to bring the account of the explorations up to date, that the whole may be included in the same printed record. In the meantime, however, I thought an account of an exceedingly interesting find, of a special character, which has very recently taken place, would be acceptable to the Society.

It was on the 3rd of the present month (October, 1879) that the workman came upon the votive tablet with inscription, which is depicted in the photograph I have the pleasure of laying upon the table. It is of a soft grit stone, which probably came from Weardale, and measures 23 inches in length by 6 to 7 inches in thickness. Its original breadth was probably 18 inches. It was broken, doubtless in ancient times, and what we have is not the whole: our fragment is of the full length, but only 16 inches wide at the top, and 10 inches wide at the bottom. Consequently a considerable portion of the inscription is gone. Fortunately, however, there is little difficulty in supplying the part that is wanting. The tablet contained two sculptured figures,

one male, the other female, the latter of somewhat smaller proportions than the former. The male figure is partially draped; probably the female figure was so also. With his right hand the male figure grasps the left hand of the female, and his left hand is on the neck of a serpent coiled round an upstanding balk of wood. Over and about the head of the female is the first part of the inscription, and beneath the feet of the two figures is the latter part. I sent impressions of the two portions of the inscription, as soon as I had seen the tablet, to our distinguished secretary, Dr. Bruce, to Mr. Roach Smith, Dr. Hübner, Mr. Thompson Watkin, and other friends and correspondents. To Dr. Bruce and Mr. Roach Smith I sent, at the same time, my restoration of the lost portion and expansion of the whole, which were as follows:—

[AES]CVLAPIO  
 [ET]SALVTI  
 [PRO SALV]TE ALAE VET  
 [TONVM.] C·R·M· AVRE  
 [L·GLOSS]OCOMAS·ME  
 [V·S·]L·M·

Expanded:—

AESCVLAPIO ET SALVTI,  
 PRO SALUTE ALAE VETTONUM,  
 CIVIVM ROMANORUM,  
 MARCUS AURELIUS GLOSSOCOMAS,  
 MEDICUS,  
 VOTUM SOLVIT LIBENS MERITO  
 (or? MERITIS).



It is with much satisfaction that I am able to state that all concur in this restoration and expansion, reserving only the cognomen of the dedicator. With regard to it there must be doubt. What the first syllable may have been must remain matter of conjecture. Reserving that point Dr. Bruce and Mr. Roach Smith concurred fully in the interpretation given; and Dr. Hübner and Mr. Watkin, to each of whom I sent impressions only, sent restorations and expansions iden-

tical with mine. Mr. Watkin left the cognomen blank, while Dr. Hübner suggested HABROCOMAS. A learned prelate of our English Church, to whom I also gave impressions, suggested CHRYSOCOMAS. For GLOSSOCOMAS I must confess I have not found any authority, though, when I suggested it, I thought I remembered it as a name. HABROCOMAS means in Greek, to which language the cognomen seems certainly to belong, "the soft-haired one," and CHRYSOCOMAS means "the golden-haired one." Each, if I have understood my friends aright, has actually occurred as a proper name. With the exception of the name of the dedicator, then, I think we may conclude that the inscription, in English, was certainly as follows:—

"To Aesculapius and Salus,  
For the Health and Safety of the Ala of the Vettonians,  
Roman Citizens,  
Marcus Aurelius Habrocomas (or other name\*),  
Physician,  
Has erected this  
In due and cheerful performance of his vow."

A question of great interest now arises:—What light does this tablet throw upon the military occupation of Vinovium? Other subordinate questions, also of much interest, such as the peculiarity of a dedication to Aesculapius *and* Salus, the probable nationality of the dedicator, his profession, &c., I shall at present pass over. But, with regard to the first question, it appears to me that this tablet is one of prime importance. It seems to intimate that the Ala Hispanorum Vettonum, Civium Romanorum, garrisoned Vinovium at one period of its history. The Vettones were a people of the Spanish Peninsula, dwelling in what is now the Province of Salamanca, between the rivers Douro and Tagus, the scene of several celebrated exploits in our own Peninsular War, and were renowned as horsemen. They are mentioned by the Roman poet Lucan in the 4th Book of his *Pharsalia*:—

His praeter Latias acies erat impiger Astur,  
Vectonesque leves, profugique a gente vetustâ  
Gallorum, Celtae miscentes nomen Iberis.

\* Since the paper was read, Mr. R. Carr Ellison has suggested another name, LEUCOCOMAS, "The white-haired one."

“They,” Afranius and Petreius, “had, besides their Italian troops, the unwearied Asturian, and the swift Vettonians, and the exiles from the ancient race of the Gauls who mingle in their designation the names of Celts and Iberians.” Silius Italicus also speaks of them, and of the rare qualities of their horses, and of the marvellous manner in which it was believed the breed of their horses was maintained, in the 3rd Book of his Punic War:—

At Vettonum alas Balarus probat aequore aperto.  
 Hic adeo cum ver placidum, flatusque, tepescit,  
 Concubitus servans tacitos grex prostat equarum,  
 Et venerem occultam genitali concipit aurâ.  
 Sed non multa dies generi, properatque senectus,  
 Septimaque his stabulis longissima ducitur aetas.  
 At non Sarmaticos attollens Susana muros  
 Tam levibus persultat equis; huic venit in arma  
 Haud aevi fragilis sonipes, crudoque vigore,  
 Asper frena pati, aut jussis parere magistri.

“On the other hand, Balarus displays the alae of the Vettonians in the open plain. Among these people, moreover, when peaceful spring comes and the air grows warm, the herd of mares, making silent unions, expose themselves to the breeze and conceive hidden offspring from the prolific air. But the race has not long life, and old age hastens on, and the seventh year in the stalls of this country is passed in extreme old age. But the city of Susa, raising aloft its Sarmatian walls, does not command such swift horses. The war horse comes hence to battle, not tender through youth, but fierce with crude vigour, to bear the rein and obey the behests of his rider.”

The Vettonians probably came into Britain with Hadrian. They are mentioned in the Malpas Diploma, with which it will be noticed the C.R. of our inscription perfectly accords. They are mentioned, too, in inscriptions found at Bath and Bowes. Neither of those inscriptions, however, necessarily suggests military occupation. On the contrary, the Bowes inscription, read by the light of ours, seems to lead to the conclusion that they were stationed at no great distance from Bowes, but not actually there. We will dismiss the Bath inscription first. It was discovered in 1736, and is upon a sepulchral slab. It reads thus, according to Prebendary Scarth, who has described it in his “Roman Remains of Bath:”—

L·VITELLIVS·MA  
 NTAI F TANCINVS  
 CIVES·HISP·CAVRIESIS  
 EQ·ALAE·VETTONVM C·R·  
 ANN·XXXXVI·STIP·XXVI  
 H· S· E·

That is to say:—"Lucius Vitellius Tancinus, the son of Mantaus, a Spanish citizen, of Caurium, a horseman of the Ala of the Vettonians, Roman citizens, who died aged 46 years, having served in the army 26 years, lies buried here."

Tancinus, when ill, may have gone to Bath for the benefit of the waters. In the absence of any further record of the Ala at Aquae Solis, we cannot conclude from his sepulchral monument that the Ala was stationed there.

The Bowes inscription is very interesting. It was found there many years ago, and is on an altar dedicated to the goddess Fortune. It reads thus, according to Horsley:—"Deae Fortunae. Virius Lupus Legatus Augustalis Propraetor. Balineum vi ignis exustum Cohors Prima Thracum restituit, Curante Valerio Frontone Praefecto Equitum Alae Vettonum."

That is to say:—"To the goddess Fortune. Virius Lupus, Imperial Lieutenant, Governor of Britain. The baths burned to the ground the First Cohort of the Thracians rebuilt, under the superintendence of Valerius Fronto Praefect of the Cavalry of the Ala of the Vettonians."

This is perfectly consistent with the location of the Ala of the Vettonians at Vinovium. The architect of the restoration was Valerius Fronto, the Colonel of the Vettonian Dragoons, who may have acquired a reputation for skill in such matters, but the instruments were not his own soldiers, but the First Cohort of the Thracians. Bowes is at no great distance from Vinovium. There cannot be a doubt but that there was a direct road in Roman times between the two places. What more natural than that the man specially qualified for the work, when so near at hand, should be called upon to superintend the re-erection of the building, especially if it was done by order of the Propraetor, the Governor of Britain, himself, as it is very possible it was.\*

\* The Vettonians are also mentioned, Mr. Thompson Watkin informs me, in an inscription found, about two years since, on a portion of a sepulchral slab, near

It is remarkable how many important public edifices were re-erected in this frontier district within a generation, and for the same or similar assigned reasons. The baths at Bowes had been burned down, but a granary, probably the Commissariat stores, at Great Chesters, the arsenal, and general's headquarters, at Lanchester, had "tumbled in through age." The words used, in each of these latter instances, are "conlabsum vetustate." I can understand them in no other sense than as implying a long absence of the Romans from the stations, a period of desolation, or, at any rate, of neglect, during their absence,—the natives would use other fortresses and other edifices,—a re-occupation, and a re-edification of the burned or dilapidated structures. The baths at Bowes seem to have been rebuilt not far from the year A.D. 202, the stores at Great Chesters about A.D. 225, the arsenal and general's headquarters at Lanchester about A.D. 239. I think the dedication of our tablet belongs probably to pretty nearly the same period as the rebuilding of the baths at Bowes. Possibly the army surgeon, Chrysocomas, or Habrocomas, accompanied the Vettonian cavalry, when the expedition was made from Eboracum or Isurium, which resulted in the re-conquest of the southern portion, at least, of the Highland district, and possibly he registered a vow to Aesculapius and Salus, that, if his charge escaped decimation by wounds or sickness or both combined, he would duly manifest his gratitude when the lost stronghold was recovered, and the eagles again spread their wings in our dangerous and difficult region. If so, the tablet is a witness to the stubbornness and prowess of our British forefathers.

I do not think the Vettonian Ala can have been the first garrison of Vinovium, for the bricks and tiles, apparently used at the time of the first building, bear the stamp N CON; the meaning of the second portion of which inscription has never yet been made out. That the first conquest was a difficult one, we may be sure, not only from the

Brecon, now in the possession of Mr. Baron Cleasby. It is, unfortunately, only fragmentary. What there is reads thus:—

DIS. M . . . . .

CAND . . . . .

NI. FILI . . . . .

HISP. VETT . . . . .

CLEM. DOM . . . . .

AN. XX. STIP. III. H . . . . .

nature of the country, and the acknowledged bravery of the Britons, but from the words of Juvenal in his 14th Satire:—

Vitem posce libello ;  
Dirue Maurorum attegias, castella Brigantùm,  
Ut locupletem aquilam tibi sexagesimus annus  
Afferat.

Which may be freely rendered:—

“Petition for a centurion’s post,  
Enter the army, take active service,  
Destroy the tents of the Moors, the fortresses of the Brigantes,  
That, by the time you are sixty years old, you may  
Get appointed to some lucrative berth.”

A mode of reference to the hardy warriors of our northern counties which certainly seems to intimate that they gave the all-powerful Romans in Hadrian’s days more trouble than Cabul and Candahar have given us, thus far, in these. Martial’s words, also, in the 4th Book of his Epigrams:—

Rides nomina ? Rideas licebit.  
Haec tam rustica malo quam Britannos.

“You laugh at our Spanish names ? Laugh if you like.  
Uncouth as they are, I like them better than the Britons.”

imply the same, for they show that Vinovium, Vindomora, Cilurnum, and Eboracum, were in everybody’s mouth in Rome at that time, as Ali Kheyl, Shutargardan, and Khoorum, have been in ours of late. And this view of the subject is confirmed, in a most interesting manner, by a Roman inscription lately found at Escombe Old Church. Mr. Longstaffe was the first to point out that there were letters on a stone in the north wall of the nave of the Saxon Church there, which he gave as c.v. Mr. Pritchett, of Darlington, examining them more closely, and removing some of the plaster with which a portion of the inscription was covered, found that they were LEG VI. I have not yet been able to examine them for myself, so cannot tell whether the LEG VI was followed by another v.\* But, whether so or not, it is plain, I think,

\* I have since examined it carefully, but without discovering any trace of a final v. It is possible, however, that the stone was shortened before it was built into the wall of the church.

that the "Sixth Legion, the Victorious," was engaged in the first reduction of Vinovium, and that some circumstance of more than ordinary import induced it to leave a memorial of its presence there. Then the "Numerus Con . . . ." would, I take it, be left in permanent possession, until, in the lapse of time, and after an abandonment and a reconquest, that duty devolved upon the Ala Vettonum.\*

It will be interesting now to note how the occupation of Vinovium by the Vettonian cavalry, which I have been engaged in deducing from the tablet just found, fits in with the other inscriptions which have been discovered, in former times, at Binchester.

I think these number, as far as have been recorded, eight. Unfortunately, but one of the whole number is known to be still in existence. Of the rest, one, I think, contained only the letters V·S·L·M· still legible. Another told us nothing of the dedicator but his cognomen, Gemellus. A third was erected by a consular beneficiary. Each of the other five has a direct bearing on our question.

The inscription still known to be in existence is on an altar at Durham. The dedicator was Marcus Valerius Fulvianus, "praefectus equitum,"—"colonel of horse." This entirely accords with an ala of cavalry being in garrison. Another was on a sepulchral slab erected to the memory of Nemontanus, "decurio"—"captain of horse." This equally accords with the arrangement. The slab was erected by the brother of Nemontanus "and his coheirs in obedience to his will." This looks very much like settled occupation of the post by the cavalry, and by cavalry who were Roman citizens. Another has always been a puzzle. It is given in a letter from the Rev. J. Farrer, of Witton-le-Wear, to the Rev. Mr. Randall, of Whitworth, now in the possession of the Rev. W. Greenwell, as:—

SVLP VIC

VETT

CANN

V · S · L · M

But Mr. Farrer intimates that it was far from being perfectly legible.

\* Unless the abbreviation "Con." stand for Concordiensium or Consaburen-sium, in which case the "Numerus" might be a portion of the Vettonian cavalry recruited from the neighbourhood of Concordia or of Consabrum. These were cities of Spain near to, if not actually within, the country of the Vettonians.



I will not discuss now what letters the first and third lines probably consisted of, and what they meant, but the correspondence of the second line with the tablet recently discovered is obvious and remarkable. So, also, is one of the various readings of the inscription on another altar given by Camden, Cotton, and Sibbald. Camden's reading is well known. It contains the word CARTOV . . . . Sibbald's reading, however, runs thus:—

TRIB·OI· . . . T  
 CART \* OVAL  
 MARTI VETTO  
 GENIO LOCI  
 LIT·IXT

Whatever may be made of the rest, the remarkable coincidence of the word VETTO, again, with the tablet just found, and with the Rev. J. Farrer's altar, is very striking.

The only inscription I have yet to notice is:—

· · MANDVS  
 EX·C·FRIS  
 VINOVIE  
 V·S·L·M

This Mr. Watkin renders, "Amandus, one of the Cuneus of Frisians called the Vinovian;" Dr. Hübner, "Amandus, one of the City of the Frisians, to the goddess Vinovia." A Cuneus was a body of soldiers. If Mr. Watkin's interpretation seem to militate against the occupation of the station by the Ala Vettonum, (though I do not think it necessarily does), Dr. Hübner's interpretation certainly puts no obstacle in the way. I should add that a great number of horses' teeth have been dug up during the exploration, and that several of the large buildings explored last year, on the line of the main street, in the rearward portion of the station, presented appearances in every way consistent with the hypothesis that they had been used for stabling horses on an extensive scale.