

VI.—RECENTLY DISCOVERED ROMAN INSCRIPTIONS.

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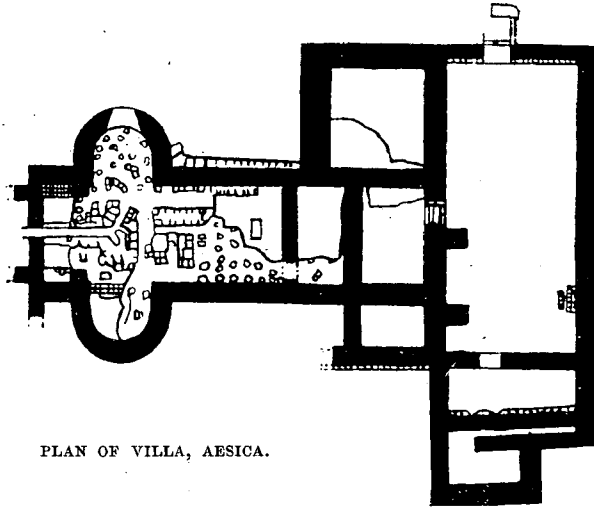
I.—AN ALTAR FROM AESICA.

The chief part of the work carried out on behalf of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne at AESICA (Great Chesters) in 1897, was the excavation of a building lying about a hundred yards to the south of the south-east angle of the camp, descriptions and plans of which are to be found in *Arch. Aeliana*.^{*} Buildings of a similar character had previously been found at CONDERCUM, CILURNUM, PROCOLITIA, BORCOVICUS and VINDOLANA, each lying a short distance from its respective camp, and all being within, *i.e.*, to the south of the line of the great Wall. Careful examination of these buildings, their position, their surroundings and their contents, tends to show that they were the suburban villa residences of officers commanding the camps. Buildings of the same type have been found in Germany, outside of, and in similar relation to, many of the camps on the line of the Pfahlgraben. There it has been the fashion to call them 'baths,' but the small size of the baths in the buildings in question, and the absence of the provision of an adequate water supply, show they cannot have been intended for public baths.

At AESICA the whole of the villa was not uncovered, as a farm roadway, which was not allowed to be disturbed, passed over its western end, and the eastern chambers were piled up with soil, taken from the central buildings, when the advance of winter terminated the work. The excavations then made remained

^{*} Vol. xxiv, pp. 44-64.

open until last month, but they had become so ruinous that it was decided to preserve what remained of them by covering them again with soil. In July, 1908, being then engaged in excavations on Cawfields farm, we took the opportunity of removing the piled up soil from the north-east chamber, and of thoroughly excavating to its original floor level in the hope that an inscription might possibly be found giving some clue to the use of the building. In carrying out this work, on the eastern side of the chamber was found the top of an altar that had been



PLAN OF VILLA, *AESICA*.

broken off too high to contain any of the first line of its dedication, except a portion of the first letter that appeared to be the top of a D. Further search revealed the remainder of the altar partially tumbled over and leaning against the inside of the wall immediately west of the doorway that enters the north-east chamber (on the plan above given) from the north. The altar, shown in the illustration, has been roughly broken with considerable violence, and much of the top line of the inscription has



ROMAN ALTAR FROM AESICA.

(From a photograph by Mr. F. Gerald Simpson).

been lost; the lower portions only of four of the letters of the first line being left on the body of the altar. It is made of a coarse-grained local freestone, and its dimensions are: total height, twenty-five inches; extreme width, eighteen and a half inches; depth from front to back, seventeen inches; inscribed face, fourteen inches high by sixteen inches broad; height of letters of first line, two and a quarter inches; height of letters of other lines, one and three quarter inches. The lower part of the altar for the depth of one and a half inches has been reduced, apparently to fit it into a base, of which, however, no trace could be found. Its ornamentation is simple, and consists of boldly cut roll-mouldings, three above and three below the inscription, which are carried around the sides and back. At the top of each side of the focus, which is very small, is a bold roll extending from the front to the back of the altar. A peculiar and unusual dish-shaped ornament surrounds the focus. A similar ornament occurs on a large and very fine altar dedicated to the genius of the pretorium, by Pituanus Secundus, prefect of the fourth cohort of Gauls, which was found at VINDOLANA, the next station eastward from AESICA, and is now in the Chesters museum. There, however, it extends vertically between the ends of the rolls on the top face of the altar instead of being horizontal and around the focus, as in the AESICA example (see next page).

The inscription, which is of well-cut letters, has consisted of six lines, all fairly legible except the first, of which little remains. The reading of the five lower lines appears to be:

VEXS	✽ C ✽	RETO	The last letter of the first line is certainly v,
QVORVM	CVR		and the remaining fragment of the first
AM . AGIT	TABE		letter on the broken top is part of a D, and
LLIVS	VICTOR		after careful measurements of the other frag-
✽ D ✽			ments remaining, which showed them to



ALTAR FROM VINDOLANA (*Lapid. Sept.*, NO. 251).

be on a slightly larger scale than those below, it appeared that DAE FORTV would just fill in the whole of the available space on the first line. DAE occurs as a contraction of DEAE in altars found in the similar villas at CILURNUM and PROCOLITIA, which are dedicated to the goddess Fortune; of the eight letters in DAE FORTV. there are distinct indications of five, viz., the first and last four. As in many of the villas in the immediate neighbourhood of Roman frontier camps dedications to the goddess Fortune have been found, there seems to be no reason to doubt the correctness of this reading, although the contraction of FORTVNAE to FORTV is an uncommon one. FORTVNAE is usually inscribed in full without any contraction. FOR, FORT, FORTVNE and FORTVNA occasionally occur, but the commonest form of contraction appears to be FORTVN.

The goddess Fortune was a very popular divinity with the Romans, about thirty temples having been erected to her honour in Rome itself, and more than that number are recorded in Britain. She was believed to distribute evil and good entirely according to her own caprice, without having any regard to the claims of merit. She represents almost exactly what we now call luck. The sporting columns of our newspapers that furnish the latest betting news are read with an avidity that shows we are not in a position to reproach the Romans for their superstitious worship of the fickle goddess. There is a little doubt as to the exact name of the centurion who erected and dedicated the altar. The letters TABELLIVS may represent prenomen and nomen, TITUS ABELLIVS, or nomen alone, TABELLIVS. Probably the former rendering is the correct one, as the formation of the name seems to be Roman and not barbarian. Roman officers frequently commanded auxiliary troops, and the Romans used the prenomen much more commonly than did the barbarians. In the inscription both triangular and leaf stops are used, and there are no ligatured letters.

The expanded reading of the inscription would be: D(E)AE FORTV(NAE) VEX(ILLATIO) C(IVIVM) RETO(RVM) QVORVM CVRAM AGIT T(ITVS) ABELLIUS VICTOR C(ENTVRIO). Freely rendered in English this would be: 'A detachment of Rhaetian citizens, commanded by the centurion Titus Abellius Victor, erects this altar to the goddess Fortune.'



INSCRIBED TABLET FROM AESICA.

The garrison of the station of AESICA recorded in the *Notitia Dignitatum* is the first cohort of Asturians but numerous inscriptions found in the station show this to be a clerical error, as they are all set up by the second cohort of Asturians.

AESICA, like other stations on the line of the Wall, furnishes evidence of its occupation by auxiliary troops of different

nationalities. Rhaetians are mentioned on an inscribed tablet found about forty years ago at AESICA, which is now in the Black-gate museum.*

A careful examination of this inscription shows what remains of the letter in the third line preceding RAETORVM to be the last stroke of an M instead of an I, as it has hitherto been read; this indicates the probable reading to be CIVIVM RAETORVM rather than COHORS I RAETORVM, and is one of the reasons for expanding the c. RETO of the AESICA altar into CIVIVM RAETORVM rather than COHORS I RAETORVM, as was at first suggested.

The Rhaetians were an Alpine tribe which inhabited a district including portions of northern Italy, Switzerland and Austria, the Engadine and the Tyrol-ese Alps being included in their territory. They were conquered by Drusus and Tiberius, stepsons of Augustus, in one campaign in 15 B.C.



ALTAR FROM BIRRENS.

* This inscription belongs to a period between A.D. 162 and 169.

No allusion to any Rhaetians occurs in any of the diplomas found in Britain, and inscriptions alluding to them are uncommon. At Birrens an altar was found about 1812 A.D., which is now in the national museum of Scottish antiquities at Edinburgh.* The inscription it bears records its dedication to Mars and Victory by Rhaetian citizens fighting in the second cohort of Tungrians, commanded by Silvius Auspex, prefect. This second cohort of Tungrians, like the first cohort, of which so many records have been found at BORCOVICUS, was a milliary one, and had in its ranks a number of mounted men. From inscriptions it would appear to have been in garrison at Birrens during the Roman occupation of Scotland, and subsequently to have had quarters at Castlesteads, the next station west of AMBOGLANNA, on the line of Hadrian's Wall.

At Risingham (HABITANCUM) fragments of an inscription were found by Mr. R. Shanks in 1849, in which mention of Rhaetians occurs.†

Mr. W. Thompson Watkin records the finding at MANCUNIVM (Manchester) of the lower portion of an altar between 1828 and 1836.‡ The inscription, from which the dedication is missing, shows it had been erected by vexillations of Raeti and Norici.

Among continental inscriptions in which mention of the Raeti is found are those at Messina in Sicily and Moguntia in Gaul.

The inscription most nearly resembling that on the newly found AESICA altar is one built into the doorhead of the north-west stair in the nave of Jedburgh abbey (as shown on next page).

Freely rendered this is: 'Dedicated to Jupiter, the best and greatest of the gods, by a detachment of Rhaetians, under the charge of Julius Severinus, a tribune.' The meaning of GAESA after RETORVM is doubtful.

* Museum Catalogue, 1892 ed., p. 225, f.v., No. 2.

† *Lapid. Sept.*, No. 628, *C.I.L.* VII, No. 1002. ‡ *Roman Lancashire*, p. 189.

It seems probable that the vexillation recorded in this inscription was a more important one than that at AESICA, as its commander was not a centurion but a tribune, an officer of higher rank. This stone doubtless has been brought from the Roman station at Cappuck, which lies on the Watling street about three miles south-east from Jedburgh,



where excavations, made some years ago by Mr. Walter Laidlaw of Jedburgh, on behalf of the marquis of Lothian, revealed the existence of important buildings, including a granary over 60 feet long.*

A cast of this stone, presented by the marquis of Lothian, is now in the Black-gate museum.†

Through the kindness of Mr. Henry Coulson, the owner of Great Chesters, the AESICA altar has been presented to your society, and is now in the annexe to the Black-gate museum.

II.—A CENTURIAL STONE FROM COCKMOUNT HILL.

In getting some stones for repairing walls near the Cockmount hill mile-castle, the shepherd came upon an inscribed stone of the type usually known as centurial stones, which are supposed to be records of the beginning and ending of the length

* *Proceedings of Berwickshire Naturalists' Club*, 1892-1893.

† *Arch. Ael.*, 2 Ser., XII, 94, No. 208.