III.—AN ALTAR FROM SOUTH SHIELDS, NOW AT OXFORD.

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In the entrance hall of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, stands a large and handsome altar of buff freestone, with sculptured ornament on the sides and back, and a somewhat weathered inscription on the front. The ornament consists of a *patera* and jug on one side, and a sacrificial knife and axe on the other; on the back is a vase of *crater* shape.

The altar was found at South Shields in the seventeenth century, and came into the hands of Martin Lister at York, who published it in the *Philosophical Transactions* for 1672 (vol. xiii, p. 70, plate i). In the time of Horsley it had disappeared, having in the meantime travelled, apparently, to Norwich: and the reading given in Horsley's *Britannia Romana* (p. 287; *Durham*, no. 2) reproduces Lister's. These readings are so far from satisfactory that little would be gained by quoting them here. The same is true of the next reading. This is Chandler's, in *Marmora Oxoniensia* (p. 3, plate i, no. 3). By his time the stone had come to Oxford, and there it has since remained.

Hübner, while collecting material for the seventh volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, saw the stone and attempted to read it. His version[1] is very incomplete and inaccurate, and he describes the lettering as almost entirely obliterated; but none the less he gives a reading which indicates with tolerable certainty the general drift of the text. He was followed by Bruce, who made a

[1] CIL. vii, 496.

Fig. 1.—Bruce's cut of the South Shields Altar (front).

Fig. 2.—Bruce's cut of the South Shields Altar (back).

very great improvement on Hübner's reading, and in fact came within measurable distance of a correct transcription. His drawing in *Lapidarium Septentrionale*, here reproduced,[2] is beyond comparison in its superiority to anything previously done.

In points of detail, however, Bruce's text still leaves something to be desired, and it has been unaccountably overlooked by the editors of the *Corpus*, who never referred to it in any of the five supplements containing additions and corrections which have been published down to the present day. For both these reasons it seems worth while to publish the stone afresh, especially as it has a very decided interest of its own which has not been previously observed. With the consent of the Keeper of the Ashmolean, Dr. D. G. Hogarth, I therefore devoted some time to the study of the inscription, and am now able, also by his kind permission, to reproduce the accompanying drawing on p. 60.

For the sake of comparison I print side by side the successive readings of Hübner, Bruce and myself.

Hübner:—	*Bruce*:—	*Myself*:—
	i o m	
CONSERVATO	CONSERVATO	CONSERVATO
RI PRO *salu*	RI.PRO.SALV	RIB.PRO SALV
TE M.*au* RƎL	IMP / / / / / / RƎL[3]	IMP.C M AVRƎL
ANTONINI	ANTONINI	ANTONINI
5 AVGᖷ / / IMP	5 AVG *br*IT MAX	5 AVG BRIT MAX
/ / / / / / / / /	/ / / / / / / /	/ / / / / / / / E
/ / / / / / / / /	/ / / / / / / /	/ / / / / / / /
/ / / / P / / ƎNS	/ / / / / RƎNS	C / / II RƎNS
OB REDITV	OB REDITV	OB REDITV
		IO V S

[2] *Lapid. Sept.*, no. 537.

[3] So Bruce's woodcut; in his text he reads TE M *au*REL, following Hübner; but this is

The reading of the first five lines presents no serious difficulty. The letters are weathered and do not leap to the eye, but on careful inspection they can be made out with complete certainty. The initial I.O.M. which Bruce conjectured is not on the stone, and never has been; he was driven to supply it by the reflection that the singular *conservatori* was intolerably harsh unless read as the attribute of a deity previously named. In fact, however, the epithet is in the plural, *conservatoribus*, which does away with this difficulty. In the fifth line Bruce conjectured the right text, though unable to see it on the stone, where however it is quite legible. He also saw that lines six and seven had been purposely erased, but he failed to interpret this fact aright, and supposed that they had contained the name of a dedicator who had fallen under the displeasure of the Emperor. This Emperor, he saw, was Caracalla; and the fact that the name of Geta is not now on the stone, led him to date it after the latter's death. Hübner thought that the Emperor named on the stone might be Caracalla, but he read so strange a version of his name and titles that he rightly felt some diffidence about this.

It is in fact obvious enough that the altar is a dedication for the welfare of Caracalla and Geta, the two sons of Septimius Severus; that it was erected after their joint accession, and that, as often happens in such dedications, the name of Geta has been erased after his death by order of Caracalla.

The inscription, as I read it, runs as follows. I may here remark that I completed my reading and interpretation before looking at Bruce's copy, so that the version given by myself is independent of his.

impossible, since if (as he thinks) the altar dates after Caracalla's accession, it must ascribe to him the imperial title. Similarly in line eight his text reads *li*BENS M(=*libens merito*), while his woodcut gives the remaining letters correctly. This is only one of many cases in which the text and illustrations of the *Lapidarium* differ as to reading, a policy deliberately adopted by Bruce, but perplexing to his readers.

Conservatorib(us) pro salu(te) Imp(eratoris) C(aesaris) M(arci) Aurel(ii) Antonini Aug(usti) Brit(annici) Max(imi) [et Im(peratoris) C(aesaris) P(ublii) S]e[(ptimii) Getae Aug(usti)] . . . . . rens ob reditu(m) v(otum) s(olvit). "Dedicated to the Preservers, for the safety of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (=Caracalla), Britannicus Maximus, and of the Emperor Publius Septimius Geta, by . . . . .rens, for their safe return, in discharge of a vow." I cannot at present either read or confidently restore the dedicator's name.

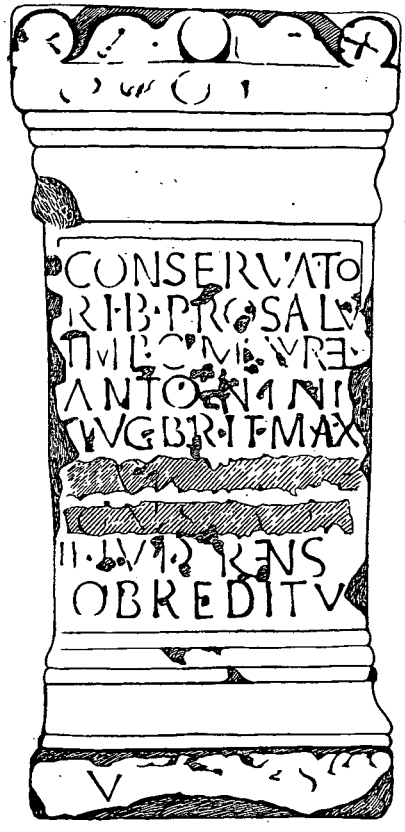

Fig. 3. Scale $\frac{1}{12}$.

The altar bears the names of Caracalla and Geta as joint Emperors, and therefore belongs to the period following the death of Severus in February, 211, and preceding the murder of Geta in February, 212. It also mentions the safe return of the two Emperors. What does this imply?

When Severus died at York, urging his sons with his last breath to agree between themselves, to enrich the soldiery with the gifts which usually marked the succession of a new ruler, and to care for no one and nothing else (Dio, lxxvi, 15), the first act of Caracalla, the elder son, was to make peace with the Caledonian enemies, whom his father was that year to have attacked, to abandon the forts which he held in their territory, and to hand over the government of

Britain to a legate called Papianus (Dio, lxxvii, 1; Zonaras, xii, 12). Rejoining his step-mother and brother, and agreeing to share the empire with the latter, he then left Britain. The brothers, bearing with them the ashes of Severus, transported their army across the sea to Gaul, in the character of victors over the Britons (Herodian, iii, 51).

The return of the two Emperors, for the safety of which the Oxford altar is dedicated, can only be their voyage to Gaul. It cannot be their return from a campaign in Scotland, for they never, after their accession, undertook any such campaign; Severus dead, the war was over. The altar can only be a memorial of the occasion on which Caracalla and Geta, accompanied by Julia Domna, sailed from Britain at the close of the war. It is a dedication for the safe accomplishment of that journey; a journey which, though celebrated with the pomp of a victorious home-coming, was really when stripped of disguises the confession of at least a partial defeat.

The dedication is unusual. There are altars dedicated *Dis Conservatoribus* (Dessau, *Inscriptiones*, 2298, 2399, 2445, 3986, 4483), but no other, I think, inscribed simply *Conservatoribus*. These Preservers are probably Jupiter, Mars, and Hercules, with Fortuna; at any rate, these are the deities to whose name the epithet Preserver is sometimes attached. The inclusion of Fortuna is rendered the more probable by the fact that she, as Fortuna Redux, is especially the goddess of a safe return from abroad.

It only remains to ask why the altar should have been set up at South Shields. The simplest answer is, that the Emperors sailed from thence. We cannot affirm this with certainty, but it is not unlikely. A large army such as that which Severus employed in his Caledonian wars, with its artillery and transport, could move more conveniently by sea than by land. It is now generally

believed that Severus based his Caledonian operations on the sea, disembarking his forces at Cramond, near Edinburgh, and this makes it the more probable that he preferred shipping his whole army from Gaul to a northern port, rather than marching by road from the Channel. If so, there are two points at which he might have aimed—the legionary fortress of York and the Tyne, the natural port of Hadrian's Wall. The written sources make it certain that he used York as his residence, which is natural enough, since it was the military capital; but his army may nevertheless have been shipped direct to the Tyne. There is plenty of epigraphic evidence for believing that the Tyne was much in use as a port for troops sailing to and from the Continent (altar to Neptune, *Ephemeris Epigraphica*, iii, 99; altar to Oceanus, *Arch. Ael.* xxv, 133, *Eph. Epigr.*, ix, 1162; slab commemorating the arrival of a vexillation from Germany, *Arch. Ael.*, xxv, 140-142, *Eph. Epigr.*, ix, 1163), and this altar very strongly suggests that Caracalla and Geta, after breaking off the Caledonian war, embarked their army for Gaul at or near South Shields. If so, it gives us a new point, though perhaps not a very important one, in the history of Roman Britain; and a new point of perhaps greater importance in the history of Tyneside shipping.