



ALTAR TO THE MOTHERS.

IX.—A NEW ROMAN INSCRIPTION AND A NOTE ON THE GARRISONING OF THE WALL.

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In the course of work at milecastle 19 at Matfen Piers in October, 1931, the North of England Excavation Committee discovered the altar which it is the purpose of the present paper to describe. Thirty or forty years ago, as contemporary volumes of *Archæologia Aeliana* and our *Proceedings* show, scarcely a meeting of this society was held without a new inscription being communicated to it; but of late discoveries have been sufficiently rare for the interest of new inscriptions to be, perhaps, proportionally greater. The new altar has, however, more than mere novelty to recommend it.

It is of freestone, 2 feet 6 inches high by 1 foot by 1 foot; the *focus* on its top is larger and shallower than on most altars of similar size in our area; on the left and right sides, in low relief, appear the usual instruments of sacrifice, the axe and cleaver; and in a panel on the front of it is the following inscription:

MATRIB
TEMPL
CVMARA
VEXCOH
I VARD
INSTANTE
P DV
VSLM

*Matrib(us) templ(um) cum ara vex(illatio)
coh(ortis) I Vard(ullorum) instante P(ublio)
D(omitio) V(. . .) v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens)
m(erito).*

"To the Mothers, a vexillation of the first cohort of Vardulli, under Publius Domitius V(ictor)¹ (has erected) a temple with an altar in willing payment of a vow."

¹ Or some such *cognomen*. It is uncommon to find initials only, as here, but there are parallels; cf., e.g., Dessau 3586, 3604.

The above reading of the text is, I think, certain, though the D in l. 5 and the V in l. 7 are somewhat obscured by cracks in the stone. The spacing of the letters is not very good; the mason has tended to crowd them at the beginning of the line, so leaving more room at the end than he has needed. The general execution of the altar is vigorous but rough; as Mr. Parker Brewis has suggested to me, its maker must have had a good tradition to follow, but his skill was not equal to perpetuating that tradition. Stylistic dating of the lettering is not easy.²

1. The best account of the *Matres* will be found in a paper by Haverfield on "The Mother Goddesses";³ there is little that can be added to his conclusions now, despite the forty years that have passed since he formulated them. Here it will be sufficient to repeat that the cult of the mother goddesses, though it may be of Celtic origin, was clearly not indigenous to Britain, but imported by troops from eastern Gaul or Germany. Temples to the Mothers are only mentioned on two other British inscriptions: one at Benwell⁴ (to the *Matres campestris*), and one at Castlesteads;⁵ and few are recorded on the continent; but there is reason to believe that such temples occurred not infrequently. One has been inferred at Housesteads, for example;⁶ the temple quarter in Trier, though as yet it has provided none dedicated to a triad of mothers, affords a large selection of shrines to individual goddesses of a similar type;⁷ and recent excavations beneath the crypt of the minster at Bonn have brought to light a great number of dedications to the *Matronæ Aufaniæ*, together with sufficient architectural fragments for a partial restoration of an extensive temple to be essayed.⁸

2. The first cohort of Vardulli (its full style was *cohors*

² Cf., however, p. 208 below.

³ In AA 2, XV, pp. 314 ff.

⁴ C 510.

⁵ C 887.

⁶ Cf. Bosanquet in AA 2, XXV, p. 197.

⁷ Loeschcke, *Die Erforschung des Tempelbezirktes . . . zu Trier*, 1928.

⁸ Rudolf Schultze, *Römische Architektur in Bonn, in Germania*, XVI, pp. 8-18.

I fida Vardullorum civium Romanorum equitata milliaria) appears in all the British diplomata from 105 to 146, and on the Colchester fragment, whose date is doubtful.⁹ In the third century it was in garrison at High Rochester;¹⁰ in the second, at Lanchester in the governorship of Antistius Adventus,¹¹ at Castlecary on the Scottish Wall,¹² and at a site near Jedburgh;¹³ here we find it, or at least a detachment of it, on Hadrian's Wall.¹⁴

Vexillations of auxiliary regiments are far less commonly met with on inscriptions than are those of legions; there are only two other instances in Britain,¹⁵ but on the continent there are further examples, from which it is possible to distinguish two main purposes for which such detachments might be formed. In time of war, they might be drawn from a number of regiments, and brigaded together for special service in their own or another province; a literary reference to this practice occurs in Arrian's *Order of battle against the Alans*, where the mounted men from a number of *cohortes equitatae* accompany the force that is to defend the frontier of Cappadocia against the threatened barbarian inroad.¹⁶ The other main purpose was more peaceful—a matter of

⁹ Cf. JRS XIX, p. 216: the consuls mentioned on it are otherwise unknown, but on internal evidence it may be dated to within a year or two of A.D. 138. I hope to deal with this point on another occasion.

¹⁰ C 1030, etc.

¹¹ C 440; the precise period of this governorship is not known, but it appears to fall in the second half of the century, probably shortly before A.D. 180. Cf. Atkinson in JRS XII, p. 67.

¹² C 1096.

¹³ Cf. PSA Scot., 1922/1923, p. 174.

¹⁴ For the date, cf. below, p. 208.

¹⁵ EE iii, 103: members of a vexillation of *coh. II Nerviorum*, perhaps then stationed at Chesterholm, erected at Carrawburgh an altar "to the genius of this place." EE vii, 968, from Hale in Cumberland, is a dedication to Hercules and Silvanus by Primus, *cu(stos) ar(morum), pro se et vexillatione*. This detachment, under an armourer-sergeant, presumably came from Moresby or Ravenglass; the dedication to Hercules and Silvanus might suggest that it had been engaged in suppressing a band of brigands, since Hercules was the traditional exterminator of pests, and Silvanus the god of the woods in which outlaws normally shelter. Another instance of this dedication, by a vexillation of legion XIII *Gemina* early in the third century, has been found in Dacia: *Dessau* 3470.

¹⁶ For Arrian, cf. vol. II, pp. 177 ff. of the Teubner edition; the best epigraphic instance is CIL 600=*Dessau* 2724.

working-parties. For example, two or three inscriptions from the quarries in the valley of the Brohl in Germany record the presence there of vexillations of *coh. II Asturum*¹⁷ and *coh. I civium Romanorum*,¹⁸ which no doubt were engaged in quarrying stone for the forts at which they were stationed. It may be that this vexillation of the first cohort of Vardulli had come to milecastle 19 to carry out repairs, on the completion of which it erected temple and altar; but the possibility of a different explanation must not be disregarded.

It has usually been assumed that the milecastles and turrets on Hadrian's Wall were occupied by detachments sent out in rotation from the forts; and though there are obvious difficulties in the way of that view, it might be suggested that the present vexillation represents such a detachment, sent here from Haltonchesters (the nearest fort) or Rudchester. But in any case it cannot have come from very far away, and its occurrence here affords evidence for the presence on the Wall of a regiment that was not there when the Notitia list *per lineam valli* was drawn up. For the date of the altar there is archæological evidence. Mr. Simpson, who supervised its excavation, just outside the south gate of the milecastle, tells me that it was on a level with the footings of the milecastle wall, in such a position that it must have been covered by the first raising of the road surface; so that it provides, in the presence of this cohort in the neighbourhood in the second century, further evidence for the movements of garrisons in Britain during that period.¹⁹

3. In the Odenwald, on the inner line of the Upper German *limes*, there is an interesting parallel to the Matfen.

¹⁷ CIL XIII, 7705; dated by the cohort's titles *p(ia) f(idelis) D(omitiana)* to between A.D. 89 and 96. By 105, the cohort was in Britain, so that the inscription affords some evidence for reinforcement of the army in Britain after the recall of Agricola. This vexillation was under the command of a colour-sergeant (*imaginifer*), so that it cannot well have comprised more than two or three dozen men.

¹⁸ CIL XIII, 7706.

¹⁹ For the garrisoning of milecastles and turrets, cf. below, p. 210; I have discussed the movements of garrisons in the second century in a paper in the forthcoming vol. XXII of JRS, *Roman garrisons in the north of England*.

Piers altar that it will be worth our while to consider; it is described by our honorary member professor Fabricius in part A, volume V, of the German Limes Commission's reports,²⁰ from which the following summary has been made:

Watch-post 37 B is a stone tower, some twenty feet square externally (similar, that is to say, to the Roman signal-towers along the coast of Cumberland);²¹ its door was raised some five feet from ground level, and approached by a flight of wooden steps. At the foot of these steps had stood an altar, inscribed thus: *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo), vexil(latio) coh(ortis) I Seq(uanorum) et Raur(acorum) eq(uitatae), sub cur(a) Antoni Natalis, (centurionis) leg(ionis) XXII P(rimigeniae) p(iae) f(idelis), ob burg(um) explic(itum) v(otum) s(olvit) l(aeta) l(ibens) m(erito)*;²² that is to say, "To Jupiter best and greatest, a vexillation of the first equitate cohort of Sequani and Rauraci, under the charge of Antonius Natalis, centurion of legion XXII Primigenia pia fidelis, paid its vow gladly and willingly on the completion of a watch-tower." The Matfen Piers altar contains no reference to building; there is a closer resemblance in the fact that in the course of time, perhaps not very long after its erection, watch-post 37 B was actually converted into a temple. Three statues were placed inside it—incidentally, the disentanglement of their origin and vicissitudes was a piece of detective work by which professor Fabricius showed that the German police would find, in him, an investigator of the highest class—the walls in its interior were plastered and painted; and later, when the inner limes was no longer garrisoned, and the cohort that had built it had moved forward to Miltenberg on the outer limes, the tower served as a shrine for the country people of the Odenwald, until its destruction by the invading Alamanni in the middle of the third century.

²⁰ *Strecke 10: Der Odenwaldlimes von Wörth am Main bis Wimpfen am Neckar*, pp. 81-92.

²¹ Cf. CW 2, XXIX, pp. 138 ff.

²² CIL XIII, 6509=Dessau 2614.

It would be unwise to press the parallel too far, or to assume that milecastle 19 was converted into a temple;²³ we may take it that a small shrine was put up inside it, or immediately outside, as happened sometimes at forts or fortresses; and, drastically though the milecastle has been robbed, we must hope that some day it may be possible for it to be excavated, and the plan of the shrine (and perhaps further altars) recovered. The parallel with watch-post 37 B may not be an exact one, but both sites will be of importance when the time comes for writing the history of the religions of the Roman army.

I have to thank Mr. R. C. Bosanquet, Mr. R. G. Collingwood and Sir George Macdonald for criticism and advice in the writing of this paper, and Mr. Parker Brewis and Mr. F. G. Simpson for their help in the examination of the altar.

THE GARRISONING OF THE WALL.

Since William Hutton first made the suggestion in his *History of the Roman Wall*,²⁴ it has been generally assumed that the milecastles and turrets were garrisoned by troops sent out in rotation from the forts. The excavation of Poltross Burn milecastle, indeed, showed that Hutton's figure of a hundred men for the garrison of each milecastle was too high—fifty would be nearer the mark;²⁵ and although the elaborateness of the buildings found there suggested a longer period of duty in the milecastles than had previously been assumed, the traditional view appears to hold the field still. But there are serious objections to that view.

²³ The place-name *Fanum Cocidi* in the Ravenna list, clearly a site in Cumberland, and the altars to Cocidius found in the structure on Pike Hill (CW I, I, p. 215), might suggest such a change in that building. Cf. CW 2, XXXII (forthcoming).

²⁴ P. 24.

²⁵ Such is Cheesman's estimate, in *The auxilia of the Roman army*, p. 109.

First, it has long been observed that the forts bear no constant relation to the milecastles; in some stretches, forts are close together, in others widely spaced out, but the milecastles are placed with almost monotonous regularity; so that some forts would have to provide garrisons for many more milecastles than others. Rudchester, the most extreme case, is seven and a half miles from the nearest fort on either side, so that it would presumably have to send detachments to as many as eight milecastles—that is to say, four hundred men at a time would need to be absent on that duty from a fort that, in the third century at all events, was occupied by a regiment only five hundred strong.²⁶ Quite apart from the smallness of the force left at the regimental headquarters, there would not be a sufficient number of troops to supply reliefs for more than two of the eight milecastles at the end of the period of duty. If, on the other hand, some of these milecastles were occupied by troops from more distant forts, their service would have been a matter of unnecessary trouble.

Again, with the exception of Greatchesters,²⁷ no fort occupies a milecastle position; normally the forts take the place of a turret, so that each has a milecastle only a third of a mile away from it; while Carrawburgh fort is only a bare hundred yards from milecastle 31. This last instance, on the current view, approaches the ridiculous; it is difficult to believe that a detachment of fifty men would be sent out once a month, or whatever the period was, for a tour of duty only a hundred yards from the regimental headquarters. The case is hardly more satisfactory where the interval is a third of a mile; the distance, it might be suggested, is not sufficiently great to justify providing separate accommodation for the guard.

Perhaps the gravest objection to the current view, however, is that it assumes a permanent system of splitting

²⁶ If the *Notitia* here applies, as seems likely, to the third century, the garrison was probably *coh. I Frisiavonum*, a *cohors quingenaria*; such a regiment is attested by the dedications by prefects, C 541 and 542.

²⁷ Conceivably, though not certainly, Drumburgh also.

up regiments into small detachments, such as could not but seriously impair military efficiency even if it lasted for a comparatively short time; and it is hardly credible that such a practice would be established by Hadrian, of all emperors the most thorough promoter of military efficiency, as a permanent feature of his new frontier policy. Certainly, the system was not in force on any other frontier; and it seems best to suppose that it was not in force on Hadrian's Wall.

Who, then, provided the garrisons of the milecastles and turrets? The analogy of other frontiers suggests that, in addition to the auxiliary *alae* and cohorts, there would be *numeri*—formations of a type first introduced by Trajan: approximating somewhat to the border levies of the north-west frontier of India; less highly trained and organized, and receiving less pay, than the regular troops; armed, for the most part, in the manner traditional in the tribes from which they were levied; and sometimes serving under their tribal chiefs, as the cohorts of the early empire had done. These formations were normally stationed in forts of their own, of a smaller size than cohort-forts, presumably because the normal *numerus* was altogether a smaller unit.

Such is the situation on the Upper German *Limes*, where one finds *Cohortenkastelle* and *Numeruskastelle* clearly contrasted; and, though there was considerable variation from province to province, on every frontier there is reason to suppose that there was some utilization of levies of this kind in addition to the regular troops. Now there is evidence for the presence of such formations in Britain, both on the Wall and elsewhere; though, as far as they can be dated, nearly all the inscriptions that refer to them belong to the third century. For the purposes of the present paper, it is not necessary to consider the evidence from other sites; but on the Wall there is the *n(umerus) Ac(. . .)* recorded on the Severan inscription from Birdoswald;²⁸ a *vexillatio* of Raetian spearmen at

²⁸ CW 2, XXIX, p. 199.

Aesica;²⁹ and at Housesteads there are the German *cives Tuihanti* belonging to a *cuneus Frisiorum*, and the *numerus Hnaudifridi*, whose members set up the latest found of the altars to the Alaisiagae.³⁰ As yet, indeed, there is no epigraphic evidence for the presence of such formations in the milecastles, but it is probable that they, rather than the auxiliary regiments, provided the garrisons for those posts.³¹

There is a passage in Ammianus Marcellinus, indeed, that seems to bear out the view that has been advanced above. It is a commonplace that, as yet, no evidence has come to light, from any turret or milecastle, of the fourth structural period that occurs regularly in the forts. That period opens with the restoration of the northern frontier by count Theodosius after the Picts' war of A.D. 368-369, when Theodosius "*Arcanos*³² *genus hominum a veteribus institutum . . . paullatim prolapsos in vitia a stationibus suis removit*"; that is to say, he removed from their stations the Arcani, a class of men, established by the ancients, who had gradually fallen into evil ways. It may be a mere coincidence, but it is remarkable that this abolition of the old-established Arcani should occur precisely at the same time as the milecastles and turrets seem to have gone out of use. It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that it was no coincidence, and that the Arcani represent, under a new name, the levies who from the establishment of the Wall assisted the regular *auxilia* in the patrolling of the frontier. It need not surprise us to find traces of them in the forts also; for the forts must always have served as the main attraction, just as they were the main defence. The regiment commander in the fort no doubt had general control over a number of milecastles, as Hutton rightly

²⁹ EE ix, 1191; this *vexillatio* was a permanent unit, unlike the temporary detachments to which reference has been made above.

³⁰ EE vii, 1041; AA 3, XIX, pp. 185 ff.

³¹ It is immaterial whether each milecastle was occupied by a separate formation, or one formation was responsible for looking after several milecastles.

³² Ammianus Marcellinus XXVIII, iii, 8. The MSS. have *Areanos*; but the emendation to *Arcanos* is a reasonable one.

saw; and to his fort—Housesteads or Greatcchesters or Birdoswald—would come the men from the milecastles, in their time off duty, to visit the shops and temples and other diversions of the settlement outside.

If the view that I have suggested is correct, the system inaugurated by Hadrian was even more thorough and, from a military point of view, far more efficient than has hitherto been supposed. That is, in keeping with all that we know of Hadrian the general; and it makes it easier to see how it was that the frontier system worked so long and so well. The auxiliary regiments were left free to act as regiments,³³ instead of the constant absence of a considerable part of their strength making even the normal scheme of training impossible.

It remains for me to thank Mr. Parker Brewis and Mr. F. G. Simpson, with whom I have discussed in detail most of the points raised in the foregoing note; and to record two earlier writers, who in some measure have anticipated me in making the suggestion.

Camden, in his account of the Picts Wall, says of the milecastles (I quote Gibson's version of 1722): "wherein the Soldiers were always in readiness to receive the Barbarians, and in which the *Areans* . . . had their stations"; and Cadwallader J. Bates, in his paper on *A forgotten reference to Roman milecastles*,³⁴ in which he discussed the anonymous tract *De rebus bellicis*, assumed indeed that the works in their existing form date from the close of the Roman occupation, but added "when we remember the regularity with which the castles occur at the end of every Roman mile, in marked contrast to the ever-varying distances between station and station, the question suggests itself whether the guard of the actual Wall may not have been confided to bodies of soldiers

³³ This does away with the difficulty that has been suggested to some students of the subject by the presence of cavalry regiments at some forts; once the view that they had to supply detachments for duty at milecastles is abandoned, their presence becomes intelligible: the *alae* at Benwell or Chesters could patrol the Northumberland plain in full force.

³⁴ In AA 2, XVI, pp. 447 ff.

distinct from the auxiliaries quartered in the stations."³⁵ It will be seen, therefore, that the view suggested above is not a new one; but I believe that the evidence in support of it has not hitherto been collected.

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 451.