

### III.—THE HORNED GOD OF THE BRIGANTES.

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#### *Acknowledgements.*

Plates XIII and XIV with kind permission of Mr. Lawrence Flannagan, Belfast Museum; Plate XV, fig. 1, with kind permission of Miss K. M. Dickie, F.S.A.Scot.; Plate XV, fig. 2, and Plate XVI, fig. 1, with kind permission of Mr. Robert Hogg, Tullie House, Carlisle; Plate XVI, figs. 2 and 3, with kind permission of Mr. David Smith, Joint Museum of Roman Antiquities, Newcastle upon Tyne. All line drawings by Mrs. Doris Ferguson.

It would be wrong to claim for the superstitious beliefs and ritual behaviour of the pagan Celts the status of one of the great religious systems of the world. There is, however, evidence which indicates a sufficient homogeneity of religious expression and attitude throughout the pagan Celtic world to make the application of the term pagan Celtic religion fully justifiable, with this reservation always in mind.

With the knowledge that the Celts did have a distinctive and tangible religion, or system of religious attitudes, one may conclude that the Celts in Britain at the time of the Roman conquest, people belonging, in common with the Gauls, to what we call the-P-Celtic family, also had their own religious cults closely similar to those of their neighbours in Ireland and Gaul. Thus, no matter how obscured they are by the influence of Roman representational traditions and by the process of *interpretatio Romana* traces of these native cults can be retrieved by various indirect approaches. Because of the numerous problems involved in investigating the religious cults of the pagan Celts, various types of

evidence for Celtic religion must be used. For example, we can use the material provided by the results of archæological excavation, tangible evidence for native cults, supported by references made by the classical writers, and we can turn to the rich *corpus* of Old Irish and Old Welsh manuscripts for the details that the material remains can never furnish and for substantiation of what is implied archæologically.

To date, the traces of British cults during the Roman period have been largely the concern of Roman archæologists who have naturally tended to consider the evidence from a viewpoint engendered by a training in classical religious traditions, and with the main emphasis falling on Roman rather than native cults. Certain features of Romano-British inscriptions and iconography have been shown to be undeniably Celtic, but there has also been the tendency to attempt to fit into the classical pattern (no matter how uncomfortably) scenes and cult figures which can be shown to belong rather to the native tradition. Then again, there is a large number of unclassified stones, which although misfits from the Roman point of view, attain sense and coherence when subjected to an analysis which relates them to Celtic concepts.

A study of the material evidence for religious cults in Britain throughout the period in question indicates that there is much of native interest, and that, supported by the information contained in the manuscript material and the evidence of place names and dedications, a classification and analysis of the Romano-British material is fully feasible. The religious cults, viewed from a wider background of Celtic traditions then, show up in a different light to that cast on them by scholars trained more or less exclusively in a classical background, for it is only from within the framework of wider study that the significance of oblique reference and fragmentary information can be appreciated. The results of the two lines of enquiry, compared and synthesized, should then produce a wider and more profound understanding of

the religious background to Roman Britain than has previously been thought possible.

An examination of the wider sphere of Celtic ritual and belief suggests that we should look for patterns of religious expression rather than for a rigidly drawn up dogma. Certain of these patterns and tendencies can be discerned throughout the greater part of the Celtic area, thus giving religious coherence and unity to a distinctive culture which covered a wide geographical area and persisted through great periods of time. It should be emphasized at the outset that when speaking of Celtic deities one must think in terms of god-types rather than of a pantheon of named deities having a universal popularity and importance. Briefly, the evidence suggests that, apart from one or two exceptions, where the deities in question may have achieved something of a national character, the individual Celtic tribes propitiated a tribal god, ancestor of the tribe, bestower of prosperity and fecundity, leader in war, judge and law-giver in peace, a general all-purpose god. He mated with the tribal goddess, she being bound up with land and locality rather than with the tribe, symbolic of maternity and fertility, influencing the outcome of battle by her magical powers rather than by physical interference, and, as the Irish evidence suggests, mating with the kings, whose office had divine associations. Over and above this basic divine couple, whose names and attributes would vary from tribe to tribe, there would be the deities of such sacred and specialized skills as metallurgy and the arts of poetry and oratory. It is into such a basic religious pattern that the material traces of Celtic cult must be fitted.

An intensive study of all the available evidence indicates that, in common with other European peoples, the Celts propitiated a horned god, or gods, and that this religious concept is absolutely fundamental to Celtic ritual thought and belief. We can trace the cult of horned animals and gods having zoomorphic characteristics right back to the Urnfield period, and the cult is then continued into a more purely Celtic con-

text. One early example consists of a brooch from Rovalls, Gotland, dating from at least the eighth century B.C.<sup>1</sup> In this single small object we can detect most of the features which are later associated with the Celtic horned gods. The serpent which forms the pin, is here given a human head which is bull-horned. This in turn is surmounted by a ram-head. The serpent, the ram and the bull are regular attributes of the horned god. Again, the sacred bull may have horns which terminate in bulbous protrusions, doubtless conveying some magico-religious significance, and the horns may be three in number.<sup>2</sup> For example, animals having horns which terminate in knobs are known from Welwyn (Hertfordshire) and Barton (Cambridgeshire). Bronze bulls having knobbed horns come from such places as Vienne and Aube. One bucket has an attachment consisting of a human head and a knob-horned bull's head from which an eagle emerges. A bronze bull from Lexden, Colchester, is represented lying down and is flattened at the back for attachment. It has pronounced horns terminating in knobs. Three-horned bulls have been found at Besançon, and others come for example from Franche-Comte and Mâcon. A three-horned bull was found at Maiden Castle, and there are also examples of three-horned boars and stags. The fine *corpus* of La Tène metalwork reveals the persistent theme of horned male heads, horned beasts, and the heads of horned beasts, ram or bull, surmounted upon human heads.<sup>3</sup>

Turning to the British Isles, one or two objects, although clearly somewhat later in date, reveal the same features. From Richborough (Rutupiae) comes a small male head in

<sup>1</sup> Illustrated by Sprockhoff, Ernst, "Central European Urnfield Culture and Celtic La Tène", *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 1955, fig. 10, 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, 1958, pl. XIII, XIV; Piggott and Daniel, "Ancient British Art", Cambridge, 1951, pl. 50; Dechelette, J., "Manuel d'archéologie préhistorique Celtique et Gallo-Romaine", II, fig. 691; *Antiquaries Journal*, no. 34, pl. XXIV; *Archæologia*, LXXVI, pl. LVIII, 3, etc.; Reinach, S., "Bronzes figures de la Gaule Romaine", II, no. 285, 288, 293, etc.; Wheeler, R. E. M., "Maiden Castle", Dorset, Oxford, 1943, pl. XXXI.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Jacobsthal, Paul, "Early Celtic Art", Oxford, 1944, II, plates 54, no. 84, 126, nos. 208 and 209; 156, no. 302; 157, no. 308, etc.; 158, 159, 160, etc., etc.

metal having knobbed horns.<sup>4</sup> This Iron Age characteristic may thus have continued into Roman times, the probable date for this object, originally a fitment for a basin no doubt used for ritual purposes, being between A.D. 55 and 77. From the same site a fragment of native pottery was recovered, decorated with what is probably a local goddess. She is likewise horned and her breasts are demarcated by small blobs of clay.<sup>5</sup> Other objects dating from the late Iron Age or early Roman period, from Thealby, the Ribble, and other areas, continue to emphasize this fundamental relationship between human heads, horned beasts, and sometimes birds, only the arrangement of the complex varying.

Here then we are particularly concerned with the manifestation of the cult of horned animals within a Celtic cult context, and in a very limited geographical area, namely the northern part of Roman Britain. We are moreover concerned with the cult of horn-bearing anthropomorphized deities rather than with the cult of divine animals, although the two cults are basically manifestations of a single religious concept. Our evidence for this cult is to be found in material remains dating from the Roman period, supported by similar material from Gaul, and in references contained in early Celtic written traditions. Ireland is very important, never having come under direct Roman influence; however we must bear in mind that the native traditions there were fostered by the Church, and no matter how sympathetic the Church was to the old, native learning, it could not allow traditions of actual worship and cult practice to flourish, and such things were modified or excluded. The ritual nature of social gatherings was concealed, and the old gods and goddesses became fairies, demons or semi-mythical heroes. The horned god was very much frowned upon, and in banishing the serpents from Ireland (the most important emblem of the Celtic stag-god), St. Patrick was probably striking a more

<sup>4</sup> Bushe-Fox, J. P., "Third Report on Excavations at Richborough", 1932, X, pl. 10, no. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Bushe-Fox, "Fourth Report on the Excavations of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent", Oxford, 1949, pl. XLI, no. 347.

forceful blow at paganism than has been generally recognized. However, information does exist under these thin disguises and there are actual references to horn-bearing supernatural beings. For example, the Metrical *Dindshenchas*,<sup>6</sup> which contains much of mythological interest, mentions Furbaide Ferbend, "Furbaide the Horned", "two horns grew on the head of staunch fair Furbaide". His martial qualities are also stressed. Also in the Metrical *Dindshenchas*<sup>7</sup> references to Feradach Fechnach, "the horned one", appear, whose war-like capacities are likewise emphasized.

Glancing at the iconographic evidence, one may note the strange horned figure seemingly recovered from the bog near Newry, Northern Ireland, and at present housed in the Chapter House of the Protestant Cathedral at Armagh (Plates XIII and XIV). As always, problems of dating are acute, an efficient system of chronology being almost impossible to establish for the Irish material, but certain features strongly argue an early dating. The sharply-jutting brows, resembling a helmet pulled well down over the forehead, are typical of several early Celtic heads from Europe. The position of the arms is one found for example on the janiform figure from Holzgerlingen,<sup>8</sup> dating perhaps from the fourth century B.C. and having a similar jutting brow-line, and great horn-like protuberances from the head. Added to these apparently early features, the general archaic appearance of the figure and the fact that it is one of several monuments of a primitive character from Northern Ireland, makes it reasonable to conclude that, although a close dating is not possible, we have here an example of a cult figure pertaining to pre-Christian beliefs in Ireland, and in line with the wider Celtic cult of horned deities.

Now the Celtic belief in a horned god-type manifested itself in two main ways, namely in representations of an antlered god of the type known in Gaul as *Cernunnos* "the

<sup>6</sup> *Metrical Dindshenchas*, Part IV, ed. Gwynn, Edward, Royal Irish Academy, Todd Lecture Series, Vol. XI, Dublin, 1924, pp. 30 and 32.

<sup>7</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 56, 1, 189.

<sup>8</sup> Jacobsthal, *op. cit.*, pl. 13.

Horned One",<sup>9</sup> and of a bull or ram-horned god, whose cult is especially well-defined in Brigantian regions. In order to demonstrate that the cult of the second type of horned god forms part of a universal cult of horned deities, it will be useful to glance briefly at some of the appearances of the stag-antlered type whose cult has also left traces in the British Isles.

The earliest representational evidence for a god of this kind occurs on a rock carving from Val Camonica in northern Italy.<sup>10</sup> It dates from about the mid fourth century B.C.; at this time the Celts were in occupation of Northern Italy. The god wears a long garment, is antlered and is standing up, an untypical attitude for the stag-god to adopt. He wears a torc, an ornament having a magico-religious significance for the Celts, over his right arm; on his left arm is another torc and beside it a serpent-like animal. He himself is not phallic, but his worshipper is markedly so, implying that one of the functions of the god was to ensure fertility and fecundity. Perhaps the most typical and the best-known representation of the stag-god is that found on one plate of the great silver cauldron found in Gundestrup, Denmark, probably of Gaulish workmanship and dating in all likelihood from the first century B.C. It is decorated with scenes from Celtic religion uninfluenced by contact with classical religious concepts, and is a very important document for pagan Celtic deities. Here the god sits in squatting attitude, possibly the national posture of the Gauls, who did not use chairs, but squatted on the ground; he is splendidly antlered, and the stag, his cult animal, stands beside him. Here he figures in his role of *lord of the animals*, and he holds the great ram-headed serpent, its size alone indicating its own cult significance. He wears a torc and holds another. There are

<sup>9</sup> The name only occurs once, on a relief from Paris dating from the 1st cent. A.D., where a representation of a stag-god is accompanied by the name (C)ernunnos. The initial letter is now almost obliterated, but there are early drawings of the relief when the initial C was clearer, and it is generally accepted by scholars that the name is Cernunnos "the Horned One".

<sup>10</sup> Jacobsthal, *op. cit.*, pl. 217a.

numerous representations of the stag-god from Gaul, where Roman representational influence has caused the indigenous deity to be figured with the sophistication of the classical pantheon. A bronze from Autun<sup>12</sup> shows the god nourishing, from a *paterna*, the ram-headed serpents which entwine his waist, and similar imagery is apparent in the statue from Sommerécourt,<sup>13</sup> a consort in this case also being represented. These are only one or two selected examples of a very well-documented god-type in Gaul.

Turning our attention now to the British Isles, evidence for the propitiation of a stag-god is less diffuse, but nevertheless convincing. There are one or two direct pieces of evidence for this cult, and some oblique references augment these. From *Corinium Dobunorum* (Cirencester) comes a relief of the stag-god, antlered and grasping the ram-serpents by the neck, the animals actually forming his legs, god and attribute thus being composite. A horned head from the same site further testifies to the cult of the same type of god in this region, and several other monuments suggest a knowledge of this religious concept. The mosaic pavement excavated at Verulamium, moreover, decorated with the head of a deity, usually identified as Oceanus, proves on close examination to be antlered, and must provide further evidence for the cult of Cernunnos in Britain.<sup>14</sup>

The horned god with his serpents became a prototype for the horned Satan, symbol of non-Christian forces, and his representational type persists in areas where traces of his actual cult are lacking, his presence on certain Christian stones alone testifying to an earlier knowledge of his cult. For example, a stone from Meigle, Perthshire, which can hardly be earlier than the eighth century A.D., bears a relief of a bull-horned figure, his legs, like those of the *Corinium* deity, composed of the serpents which he likewise grasps.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *American Journal of Archaeology*, 55, 1951, fig. 7 facing p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Espérandieu, E., *Recueil General des Bas-Reliefs, Statues et Bustes de la Gaule-Romaine*, no. 4839.

<sup>14</sup> Wheeler, R. E. M., "Excavations at Verulamium", Oxford, 1936. pl. XLV.



He is flanked by a bear and a wolf, suggesting that here, like the Gundestrup Cernunnos, he figures as *lord of the animals*. He appears in this role again on the North Shaft of the Market Cross at Kells, standing upright, moustached and emphatically horned, grasping with either hand the tail of a rearing-up wolf. This is one of several occurrences of a Cernunnos type of figure in Irish ecclesiastical iconography, the panel from Clonmacnoise being particularly impressive, the limbs of the squatting figure being intricately plaited in the manner of Celtic art, the horned serpents divorced from the deity and appearing in spiral coils above him (Plate XV, 1). Moreover, traces of Cernunnos are to be discerned in the early Irish literary tradition in the figure of Conall Cernach, whose epithet *cearnach* has the dual meaning of victorious and horned, the great ancestor/hero of Old Irish legend. One also wonders whether such a being cannot be traced in the description of Morfran son of Tegid in the mabinogi of *Culhwch and Olwen*, "no man placed his weapon on him at Camlan, so exceedingly ugly was he; all thought he was a devil helping. There was hair on him like the hair of a stag."<sup>16</sup>

The second manifestation of the cult of a horned god in Britain differs in certain respects from the Cernunnos cult discussed above. Yet, such is the complexity of Celtic religious cults that it cannot altogether be divorced from its Gaulish counterpart, and indeed there are adequate traces in Gaul of the cult of a bull-horned god which cannot have been dissimilar from the British cult. One important distinction must be made. The Gaulish *Cernunnos*, as his various symbols and attributes imply, stands for virility and fecundity, but is never ithyphallic. The only exception to this occurs at Val Camonica and here, the supplicant and not the god is phallic. The horned god of northern Britain, however, is frequently phallic. He occurs in Yorkshire, northwards

<sup>15</sup> Romilly Allen, J., "The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland". Edinburgh, 1903, p. 337, fig. 350.

<sup>16</sup> "The Mabinogion", trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, London, 1949, p. 102.

and along Hadrian's Wall, the density increasing towards the west; representations of him also appear further north at some of the outpost forts. In this considerable area of country, although complex situations do arise, the horned god manifests himself in four different ways. He appears as an armed warrior, equivalent to Mars; he is represented bearing some of the attributes of Mercury; he figures as a naked, phallic deity of the Silvanus type, and lastly, and in most typically native fashion, he appears as a horned head. These various ways in which the horned god may reveal himself will be discussed in the above order.

### *The Horned God as Mars.*

Before examining the more orthodox representations of the horned god as a warrior, it will be useful to discuss a small monument which helps to demonstrate the complexity of symbols and characteristics of native British deities. These are illustrated by a head from the outpost fort at Netherby (*Castra Exploratorum*), north of Carlisle.<sup>17</sup> (Plate XVI, 1). The style of this head is native, drawing little inspiration from classical art. The squared features, narrowed eyes and drawn-back lips are suggestive of ferocity, and this is emphasized by the ram-horns which curve boldly down from the side of the head to terminate behind the ears. The wild expression of the face is appropriate to a warrior, and the ram-horns likewise point in this direction, the ram and the ram-serpent being symbolic of war and fertility in Celtic contexts. Here then, we have a deity, represented as a head, bearing ram-horns, symbolic of war and appropriate to a warrior god. Now in this general area there are both representations of a horned, warrior god, and numerous dedications to a local god, equated with Mars or invoked under his Celtic name of Belatucadros "the Fair Shining One" or "the fair slayer". Cocidius also appears in this area in his warrior capacity, and dedications to the god Vitiris have likewise been

<sup>17</sup> In Tullie House, Carlisle. Photograph by kind permission of Mr. Robert Hogg, Keeper of Archæology.

found. It is reasonable then to suppose that in this ram-horned head we have the manifestation of a local deity in his capacity as warrior protector of the tribe, and that he is likely to have been one of the gods so frequently invoked in this region.

We have seen how the Netherby head which is one example of the god-in-head-form from this northern region, is also brought into *rapport* with the native Mars by reason of the ram-horns which it bears. This head comes from an area in which the warrior god is frequently horned. One should not perhaps overlook the great horned helmets of the early Celtic warriors, illustrated for example on the Gundestrup cauldron<sup>18</sup> and the triumphal arch at Orange,<sup>19</sup> a horned helmet being, perhaps, a fitting head-dress for those who invoked a horned warrior god.

The most impressive group of horned warrior representations comes from the region of Maryport (*Alauna*) and now forms part of the Netherhall Collection. There are several altars and reliefs in local sandstone which depict a horned god, his feet turned to the left or right of his body, suggestive of vigour and movement. The features are invariably crude and rudimentary, the horns pronounced, and in one or two instances a Saint Andrew's cross is drawn across the breast of the figure. One could perhaps bear in mind the Saint Andrew's cross which decorates one side of a small altar from Lypiatt Park, Gloucestershire.<sup>20</sup> The weapons are interesting, consisting of a rectangular shield and a large, knobbed spear, reminiscent of the descriptions of native spears given by Dio.<sup>21</sup> The horned god of this area tends to be phallic, and the phalloid stone from the same site, known locally as the serpent stone, on which a great horned or crested serpent is figured, while the second side of the stone is decorated by

<sup>18</sup> Klindt-Jensen, Ole, "Le Chaudron de Gundestrup", *Separatum Analecta Instituti Danici*, I, Hafnia, MCMLX, pl. II, no. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Klindt-Jensen, *op. cit.*, fig. 1, no. 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, Vol. 60, p. 305, and pl. XIV, fig. 26. Several other examples from this area.

<sup>21</sup> Dio, LXXVI 12.

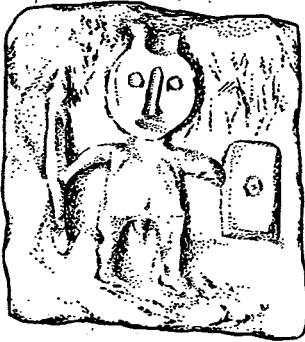


FIG. 1. HORNED ARMED DEITY  
FROM MARYPORT.

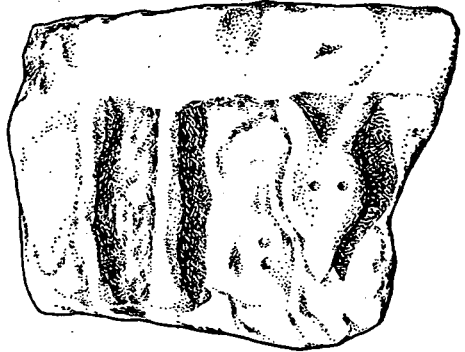


FIG. 2. HORNED SPEAR-BEARING DEITY  
FROM MARYPORT.

a neckless human head, a torc placed beneath the chin, may link up in some way with this cult of warrior, fertility gods. A few words may be said here about Celtic phallic representations. Although phallicism tends to be comparatively rare it is not entirely lacking, and it is not necessary to conclude that the phallic nature of some of these horned warrior gods is the direct result of Roman art influences. For example, the non-phallic, classical Hercules is markedly phallic in his British manifestations. Such cult objects as the wooden idol from an Irish bog, probably Iron Age in date,<sup>22</sup> with a deep hole for the insertion of the male organ; the great stone from Tara with its unmistakable significance, and the verbal descriptions in one Old Irish tale about the supernatural hero Fergus, of the exaggerated size of his genitals suggests that any paucity of phallic imagery in Celtic cult representations is due to the operation of the usual Celtic symbolism, the male organ being represented symbolically rather than naturalistically. Thus the stone head from the Cotswolds,<sup>23</sup> which is drawn on the glans of a phallus, a similar one from

<sup>22</sup> From Ralaghan, Co. Cavan. Now in the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.

<sup>23</sup> From Broadway, Worcestershire. *Antiquaries Journal*, XXVIII, pl. XXIV, e; f.

Eype, Dorset,<sup>24</sup> the serpent stone from Maryport, and other examples, would seem to represent a stage between the direct representation of the phallus itself, and the symbolism of the decapitated head set on a pillar, in itself a phallic symbol. Under the influence of Roman representational art this symbolism, certainly not evolved for reasons of "decency", would tend to give way again to direct representationalism.

Another figure of the Netherhall type comes from Burgh by Sands, the god in this case being naked, and holding a spear and a spherical object, either intended to represent a shield, or perhaps signifying some weapon such as a sling stone (Plate XV, 2). In view of the Celtic custom of fighting naked, a naked war-god is quite appropriate to this society. A similar type of figure comes from Lanchester (Longovicium), Co. Durham; here the huge, horned, bearded head is set owl-like on the atrophied body, where only the spherical attribute can be made out, while the figure is clearly phallic (Plate XVI, 3).

There are one or two other representations of this general type, of a horned warrior god, two coming from Yorkshire, and two from further afield. The Yorkshire reliefs come from Kirby Underdale, near Stamford Bridge,<sup>25</sup> and closely resemble the Cumbrian horned warrior gods in attitude, facial features and phallic character. Here the god wears a short tunic, coming to the thighs, and is represented with the same crude vigour of movement and expression. This type of horned god, so characteristically northern, is found again in the south-west of Britain, at Segontium<sup>26</sup> (Caernarvon) opposite Anglesey. The relief is broken and only the left arm can now be seen, grasping some weapon, the right being lost. The horns are well-defined. The economy of this region is likely to have been similar to that in the north,

<sup>24</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, XVI, pl. LIX 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Yorkshire Archæological Journal*, XXIV, 1917, p. 321, pl. facing p. 321.

<sup>26</sup> Wheeler, R. E. M., "Segontium and the Roman occupation of Wales", fig. 50 and p. 128.

namely a pastoral type of economy, and this figure would be an appropriate representation of the tribal god. A small altar found at Smithfield, London, also seems to fit into this group of armed, horned gods. Fashioned from oolite, and possibly having a more westerly origin than its place of discovery, it is decorated by a horned figure in relief, the face almost in profile, the feet in typical position, the calves and knee-caps well-emphasized in a fashion common to the northern figures, the hands grasping a spherical object, and something which may represent the cleft branch of a tree or again some sort of weapon resembling a catapult.

This distinctive group of monuments, although artistically crude, has a vigour and movement which in itself is impressive, and it would appear that in these figures we see the attempts of local artists to give visual expression to their concept of the local war god, protector of the herds, symbolic of fecundity and prosperity.

Before examining the other ways in which the horned god may be represented in the north, it may be relevant to mention a group of warrior gods from this same region, closely similar to the above group except that they are not obviously horned. These are found, for example, at Bewcastle, north of Hadrian's Wall, where two silver plaques are decorated by armed warriors, representing in this case the local god Cocidius in his warrior capacity. This god is equated with Mars in the west and with Silvanus in more easterly regions. The Bewcastle plaques are one of the rare examples of these warrior gods being accompanied by a name. Again, from *Pons Aelius* comes a building stone on which an armed warrior figures, having a pointed beard, emphatic calves and holding the spherical object which may represent a shield. Similar figures come from Chesters<sup>27</sup> and Maryport,<sup>28</sup> and the implication here is that we have a manifestation of an armed, local warrior god akin to and in some cases perhaps, identical with the horned warrior god.

<sup>27</sup> In Chesters Museum.

<sup>28</sup> In the Netherhall Collection.

*The Horned God as Mercury.*

It appears that over and above his affinity with Mars in his warrior capacity, the horned god could, in certain instances, become fused with Mercury. In origin, Mercury was a god who, apart from his *chthonic* associations, was invoked as a protector of the herds and flocks and it may well be that it was in this capacity he appears on the Wall, his equation with the horned tribal god facilitated by this common function. It is clear that the fusion of an indigenous horned god with Mercury also took place in Gaul where several reliefs show the crudely-represented horned god bearing what can only be interpreted as the attributes of Mercury, the purse and the *caduceus*. Moreover, one Gaulish relief<sup>29</sup> shows Mercury, his more sophisticated aspect modified by the bearded, mature face, untypical of the classical god, the sides of the relief being decorated by the ram-headed serpent, attribute of the native Mars and the horned god, Cernunnos. In northern Britain this blending of the native god with Mercury can also be witnessed in such figures as the relief from *Aesica* (Great Chesters) on the Wall, where the god has typical crude features, long horns, is phallic, the nipples and navel emphasized by deep indentations reminiscent of those found on the figure of Mars? Olludius from Gloucestershire.<sup>30</sup> A circular object is held in the right hand and the caduceus is figured in the left. The regular attributes of Mercury, the cock and the



FIG. 3. THE AESICA "MERCURY".

<sup>29</sup> Espérandieu, *op. cit.*, no. 3919, from Beauvais (Caesaromagus).

<sup>30</sup> *Trans. Bristol and Gloucestershire Arch. Soc.*, 60, p. 301 and pl. V, fig. 9; also *Sucellos*, p. 302 and pl. VI, fig. 11. A naked figure having long horns similar to those of the *Aesica* "Mercury" was recently brought into Corstopitum Museum, Northumberland, from Willowburn.

tortoise are lacking in these instances where the two traditions appear to be blended. A similar figure comes from Little Chester,<sup>31</sup> where the god is boldly horned and holds an object which hangs from his left hand, and possibly represents the *caduceus*, although this is by no means certain.

*The Horned God as Silvanus.*

In the eastern region of the Wall, and especially in the outpost forts, the horned god sometimes appears as a naked, phallic figure, usually without marked attributes. In this region, forests may have been dense, and hunting carried on by both natives and soldiers. This is demonstrated by the fact that in this area *Cocidius*, the local god equated with Mars in the west, is conjoined with *Silvanus* as a god of venery and the woods, while certain stones from Chesters (*Cilurnum*) depict a hunting scene, silvan scenes, and one stone is decorated with the figure of a stag approaching a net. It is therefore fully appropriate that the horned god should figure in this region as a god of the *Silvanus* type. Three

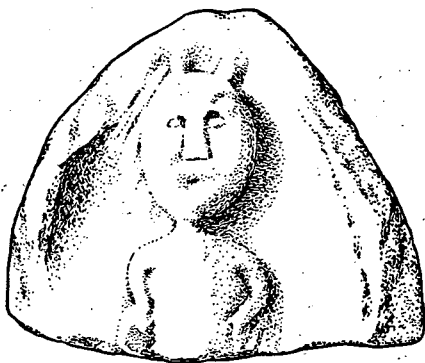


FIG. 4. HORNED GOD AS SILVANUS  
(BREMENIUM).

figures of this kind come from *Bremenium* (High Rochester); from this same fort comes the representation of a horned head.

Another, more sophisticated representation of the horned god as a *Silvanus* figure comes from Carlisle.<sup>32</sup> Here a small altar is decorated by a figure in relief; he is horned, is naked apart from a

<sup>31</sup> In Derby Museum.

<sup>32</sup> "Lapidarium Septentrionale", London, 1875, no. 494.



cloak about his shoulders. He has his left foot on a rock and holds a small animal over an altar. A naked figure with pronounced horns in Corstopitum Museum further attests to the cult of a god of this type in the general area.

*The Horned God as a Head.*

Representations of the horned god as a head are of especial interest since the cult of the human head is one which is deeply-rooted in Celtic religious tradition, and such monuments are found in the region of Hadrian's Wall and in some of the outpost forts to the north. The head from Netherby, already discussed in connection with the war god, is one of the most impressive horned heads. What appears initially to be a second head almost identical with the Netherby head, and illustrated by a drawing in Collingwood's Catalogue, reported to have come from *Magnae* (Carvoran) on the Wall, seems to be in actual fact the same head about which confusion has obviously arisen.<sup>33</sup> No trace of it can now be found, and its extraordinary similarity to the Netherby head, even allowing for the differences between a photograph and an old drawing, strongly suggests that these heads are in fact identical; this conclusion is supported by the fact that some of the objects making up the Gibson Collection actually came from Netherby. However, a very impressive horned head does come from *Magnae*, and its unfashioned back suggests that it was built into a wall, perhaps serving as some kind of apotropaic symbol. The enormous, pupil-less eyes, unequal in size, are the most impressive feature of this large head, the mouth being small and straight, and the features generally in such low relief as to be almost two-dimensional (Plate XVI, 2). It may be of interest to note that a dedication to the Gaulish goddess *Epona* "Great Horse", whose British counterpart *Riannon*—*Rigantona* "Great Queen" is known to us from the mabinogi of Pwyll, also comes from this fort at *Magnae*. A small horned head comes from *Cilurnum* (Chesters), the head being

<sup>33</sup> *Archæologia Aeliana*, XII, 1886, pp. 92, 205-9.

cut in one with the base. Again, the janiform head from *Corstopitum* bears stumps of horns on one of the heads. Another horned head was found at *Bremenium* (High Rochester), where the three representations of horned figures were also found, while from further north, from the outpost fort at Birrens (*Blatobulgium*) Dumfriesshire, comes the relief of a horned bust, the mouth open to show the tongue in the manner of some of the Irish heads. This relief bears an inscription, presumably the name of the figure portrayed. The remaining letters read . . . . . IAPU? . . . It is not easy now to determine what name is intended here, but it might be noted that a Gaulish god *ERRIAPUS* is known, and it may be that the name of this deity was something similar to this. This must be purely speculative however, the name being too fragmentary now to allow more than a very tentative suggestion. One may also mention in this context the small bronze terret from *Isurium Brigantum* (Aldborough),<sup>34</sup> where the horned male head is decorated by a leaf-crown, a La Tène symbol of deity, and a bucket escutcheon from Thealby, Lincs., showing a male head with atrophied bull-horns.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Miscellaneous Horned Figures.*

There are one or two representations of horned beings which do not seem to fit comfortably into any of the above groups. One of these is an unusual horned bust from Moresby; the figure wears an unfamiliar garment about his shoulders, resembling perhaps the kind of pleated upper garment worn by the god *Cocidius* on one of the silver Bewcastle plaques, and possibly representing some native garment peculiar to the north.

Another controversial figure is the god *Antenociticus* from *Condercum* (Benwell) on the Wall, to whom several altars were dedicated, and whose statue, broken up presumably in the great raids at the end of the second century, now consists of the impressive head of the deity, and some frag-

<sup>34</sup> Fox, Sir Cyril, "Pattern and Purpose: Early Celtic Art in Britain", Cardiff, 1958, pl. 43, A.

<sup>35</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, XV, pl. LXXI.



FIG. 5. HORNED BUST  
FROM MORESBY.



FIG. 6. HEAD OF  
ANTENOCITICUS

ments of limbs. The head, clearly influenced by Greco-Roman models, has pronounced native features such as the great profusion and treatment of the hair, the remains of a torc about the neck, the treatment of the eyes, mouth and general expression, and the strands of hair which are turned back above the brow to suggest the young antlers of a stag. A dedication to this god also comes from *Cilurnum*, and a representation accompanies this, where the god is extremely crudely depicted as a bust on the upper part of the altar. Although it seems clear that this is a Celtic deity, the fact that a Spanish garrison was stationed both at Benwell and at Chesters would perhaps suggest that this is an imported deity from northern Spain or southern Gaul rather than a god native to northern Britain, but the destruction of the temple preceded the arrival of this garrison. Although apparently horned, and Celtic, this god cannot quite be fitted into the pattern of horned gods in northern Britain.

*Summary and Conclusion.*

The evidence, in so far as we can interpret it, suggests that the Celts, both on the Continent and in the British Isles, propitiated a horned god, a tribal god who was perhaps in origin the tribal god of peoples practising a pastoral type of economy. This horned god can be seen to have two distinct but not exclusive manifestations. First of all there is evidence for the cult of a Gaulish god, antlered and torc-wearing, who may in some regions have achieved a wider significance than many of the Celtic gods who seem to have been purely local or to have borne a multiplicity of local names. It may be suggested that amongst certain of the Celtic tribes at least he achieved the status of an ancestor-god, having more than tribal significance. He may thus have been one manifestation of the great ancestor-god Dis Pater from whom Caesar states that all the Gauls believed themselves to be descended. Traces of his worship are found in the British Isles, and the more oblique, but cumulatively convincing hints from Ireland indicate his former propitiation there.

In the more northerly regions of Britain however, we find convincing evidence for the deep-rooted cult of a native horned god of a pastoral and woodland people, a warlike, and in the west strongly independent people, and we may conclude that traces of this god-type testify to a Celtic cult, not peculiar to this region but in operation throughout it. This horned god of the north could be represented now as a Mars type of warrior, again as a type of Mercury, sometimes as a god of the Silvanus type, patron of hunters and wild beasts, and lastly as a horned head, an appropriate symbol for a people who decapitated their enemies and who venerated the human head. We come now to one of the main problems of this northern cult. Are we to take it that these various representations of a horned being all stand for one distinctive deity, or is it more likely that any one of the local gods of this region could be represented in this way at a given time or in a given area? Looking at the distribution of the names of local gods, one is aware that, while the names













FIG. 1. FIGURE ON CLONMACNOISE  
CROSS SHAFT.



FIG. 2. RELIEF OF HORNED  
FIGURE, BURGH BY SANDS.





FIG. 1. FROM NETHERBY.



FIG. 2. FROM CARVORAN.



FIG. 3. FROM LANCHESTER.



of several gods cover roughly similar areas to those in which horned representations are found, no single name entirely coincides with the distribution of representations. The god Vitiris has quite strong claims, but his cult or rather traces of it are not now to be found in such outpost forts as *Bremenium* (where four horned figures occur) or at Burgh by Sands for example, while, on the other hand, the serpent which decorates one of his altars would perhaps link him with the horned god of the north.

Another claimant is perhaps Cocidius, who is a warrior in the west, as is the horned god, and a Silvanus type of deity in the east, again agreeing with the horned god. Belatucadros and Mogons are also propitiated in this general region, and a dedication to Belatucadros, found near the relief of the naked horned god at Burgh by Sands, would form a link between this deity and the horned god. With the custom of the Celts in mind of giving a number of local names to gods of essentially the same type and function, it may be more realistic to visualize in this horned god of northern Britain a native manifestation of any one of these local gods, the gods of a hunting or pastoral, warlike people, who would think of their "god of the place" as symbolic of virility and fecundity, protector of the people, leader in war and in the hunt, guide and law-giver in peace, an all-purpose tribal god of the kind suggested to us by the Old Irish tales. We have only to glance at one or two of the names for one of the leading deities of Old Irish tradition, namely *In Dagda* "the Good God" also known as *Eochaid Ollathair* "Eochaid the Great Father" and *In Ruad Rofhessa* "Ruad of Great Knowledge", to see how erroneous it would be to visualize in these three names three separate deities. It may also be noted that, apart from the bust from Birrens, no names accompany the horned heads or figures, whereas local god-names abound in the areas from which they have been recovered. This again is quite in keeping with Celtic custom, for in Celtic societies the name-taboo was strong, to name a thing being dangerous and profane. "*Tongu do dhia tonges*

*mo thuath*", "I swear by the gods by whom my tribe swears", was a regular Old Irish oath, where the gods invoked were unnamed, but understood, and the oath binding. Thus in these areas of northern Britain where the gods were represented under the influence of Roman cult representations, it was neither necessary nor in keeping with the oldest traditions to name the god portrayed.

It may not be inappropriate now to briefly glance at the great supernatural bull of early Irish traditions known as the Donn of Cualgne, about whose possession a great cattle raid was embarked upon, known as the *Táin Bó Cualgne*, "the driving-off of the cattle from Cualgne".<sup>36</sup> The society depicted is one such as archaeological research suggests flourished in Brigantia about the first century B.C.; intensely aristocratic, the nobles possessing wealth in the way of personal adornments, and decorative chariot and horse trappings, a society made up of pastoralists and warriors. The central figure in the epic is this great divine bull, his bull-form the culmination of many transformations undergone since he was a divine swineherd. Even in bull-form he retained human reason and understanding, and in the tale he is described in some of the following ways:

"One of the magic virtues of the Donn of Cualgne were the fifty youths who engaged in games, who on his fine back found room every evening to play draughts and assembly and leaping; he would not put them from him nor would he totter under them. Another of the magic virtues of the Donn was the hundred warriors he screened from heat and the cold under his shadow and shelter. Another of the magic virtues of the Donn was that no sprite or goblin of the glen dared to come into one and the same cantred with him. Another of the magic virtues of the Donn was his musical lowing every evening as he returned to his shed and his byre. It was music enough and delight enough for a man in the north and the south, in the east and in the west and in the middle of the cantred of Cualgne. These then are some of the magic powers of the Donn."

<sup>36</sup> The *Táin* is translated by Dunn, J., "The Ancient Epic Tale, *Táin Bó Cualgne*, 'The Cualgne Cattle-Raid'", London, 1914.

Elsewhere it is stated that his very lowing would put all the cows in calf, this emphasizing his great powers of fecundity, very important in a stock-raising community. Here then in an Irish pastoral type of society we have a great supernatural bull, protector of warriors, averter of evil from the province, provider of magical music (very important in early Celtic traditions), and assuring the fecundity of the herds. The prevalence of a horned warrior god in Brigantian and adjacent territory whose way of life and traditions and cult legends cannot have been altogether dissimilar from those of the early Irish is thus easily explicable; and comparatively numerous although these representations are, we must not forget that many more are likely to have been fashioned from wood, which would perish sooner, while the early Church in this northern region would doubtless have taken steps to further destroy whenever possible any material traces of the cult of such a deep-rooted local deity whose fertility characteristics and great power would make it very unacceptable to Christianity. The soldiers in the Roman army however, wherever their place of origin, were wise enough not to overlook the "god of the place", and knew that it was well within their superstitious interests to make some token homage to such a potent native god as this, whether or not he equated with some member of the more familiar classical pantheon.

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