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BRIGOMAGLOS AND ST. BRIOG

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Introductory note by A. R. Birley

IN *RIB* I, p. 541, there appears the sub-Roman tombstone from Vindolanda, "found in, or before, 1878 a short distance north-east of Chesterholm fort." The name of the person commemorated, Brigomaglos, is clearly legible in the first line, and *iacit* is clear in the second; the third is damaged and incomplete (see below for revised reading by Professor Jackson). In *RIB*, following F. Haverfield in *AA*³ XV (1918) 29, the third line is expanded [*qui et Brioc*]us, without discussion. Haverfield wrote as follows: "It is perhaps worthy of note, though it has not been noticed, that a 'Christian confessor and bishop' with a nearly identical name, Briomaglus, also called Briocus, was sent over to Gaul from Britain to join St. Germanus in the fifth century, or perhaps the latest part of the fourth century. He appears to have been the companion at one moment of two more famous men, Patrick the Apostle of Ireland, and Heltutus, or Illtud, who was famous among early Welsh Christians. It would be pleasant to think that the Chesterholm monument indicated the presence in Northumberland of a friend of these two great men, and I do not think that the difference in spelling between Brigomaglus and Briomaglus—for which indeed parallels can be cited—makes such a hypothesis absurd. We might, indeed, complete the fourth line above [*sic*: 'third' must be intended] [*qui et Brio*]cus, 'who was also called Briocus.'" In his note, Haverfield cites the publication of the *Life* of St. Briog by the R. P. Fr. Plaine, O.S.B., "Vita S. Brioci episcopi et confessoris, ab anonymo suppari conscripta," *Analecta Bollandiana* II (1883) 161 ff. There seems not to have been any further discussion of the postulated identity between the man buried at Vindolanda and St. Briog. On studying the *vita*, I was struck by the reference to *Landa Magna* in chapter 29, as a place in Britain, where the saint, on a return visit to his home—specified in chapter 1 as being in the *regio Coriticihana*—built a particularly important church. In the hope of discovering whether *Landa Magna* might conceivably be the same as Vindolanda, I consulted Professor K. H. Jackson, who supplied the following comments, dealing with the tombstone and several of the names in the *vita S. Brioci*. He has kindly agreed to my request that what he has written should be made available in published form.

Abbreviations

CIIC R. A. S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum*, vol. I (Dublin 1945)

LHEB K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh 1953)
RIB R. G. Collingwood and R. P. Wright, *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*,
 vol. I (Oxford 1965)

1. *The Inscription*

I re-visited and carefully examined the stone on 24th April 1980 in the museum, and report as follows:

BRIGOMAGLOS is perfectly clear, as also is IACIT, but the expected HI of HIC is completely worn away. In his article in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 5th series, VII, no. 25 (1890), p. 235, Bruce says there is "a horizontal stroke at the bottom [of the first I of IACIT], giving it the appearance of an L turned the wrong way"; and his excellent photograph on the same page (traced, exactly the same size, by Haverfield, p. 30) does appear to bear this out. But in fact this is illusory; the "line" in question is not straight but curved, and is clearly part of the bottom of the expected C of HIC. In the third line, the upper half of the "C" is absolutely clear, as the photograph shows, though the central space is flaked off and the lower half of this letter, and of the V, is broken away. It could as well have been a G as a C, and hence I leave it undefined in the reading below. To the left of it, the photograph appears to suggest another "horizontal!", which Macalister evidently took for the top stroke of an E (*CIIC* I, p. 475), though it is apparent from his account that he had not visited the stone, and knew only the photograph. But this too is an illusion, the mark in question is the right-hand end of a long striation, with some pittings in it (none of them, apparently, the tops of letters), which follows closely the present bottom of the stone as far as its left-hand end, as may be seen in the photograph. There is nothing to show what once preceded the C or G. I should therefore read BRIGOMAGLOS/[HI]Ç IACIT/[.....]VS, with space for at most six letters before the VS, the last of them being Ç or G. I should date the lettering, which is very typical of the numerous early post-Roman inscriptions of Dark Age Celtic Britain, in the late 5th or quite early part of the 6th century; perhaps c. 500.

2. *The name Brigomaglos*

This is of a perfectly familiar Celtic, and indeed Indo-European, type, consisting of two elements, *brīgo- "high" etc. and *maglos "chief, lord". The form on the stone is that of the British and Late British stages (for a definition of which see *LHEB* p. 4), and therefore suits the probable date of the lettering. It would have been pronounced, c. 500. as /brīyomaylos/, where the two gammas mean spirant g (commonly compared with the g in North German *tage*), and the mu means a very nasal v, for which see *LHEB* p. 481f. This had become, by the Old Welsh period, late 8th to early 12th centuries, /briamael/, correctly appearing as BRIAMAIL in Macalister's *CIIC* I, no. 978, and as Briavail a number of times in the Book of Llandaff; all these people being laymen. It did not survive as a name in later Welsh, so far as I know, except in that of the Saint, in the Modern Welsh form, spelt Briafael, Anglicized in St. Briavels on the Welsh border in Gloucestershire. The form *Briomaglus* of the

Life, instead of *Brigomaglus*, is accounted for in *LHEB* p. 457; *Briocmaglus* in the *Life* is an obvious error by fusion with Brioc.

3. The form Brioc

Hypocoristic or pet forms of Celtic two-element compound names were common, and were made in several ways, e.g. with diminutive suffixes, generally added to the first element only. One suffix which was used was the Celtic *-ācos*, an adjectival one with various meanings, including the ability to form hypocoristics, and this is the one applied to the saint, whose full name was *Brigomaglos*. This would give British **Brīgācos*, becoming in Late British */brīyōgos/*. By the Primitive Welsh and Primitive Breton period (mid-6th to late 8th centuries, *LHEB*, p. 5) this had developed into */brījōg/* (*j* = strong *y* as in “yes”), written *Briocus* in Latin; on the absence here of any spelling for the */j/* see *LHEB*, p. 457, and on the *c* for */g/*, which is perfectly regular, see pp. 67ff. The doubling of the *c* in the *Life* is merely scribal, and the suffix *-ius* instead of *-us* is a mistaken Latinization. This name is not recorded in Old Welsh, where it would have been written **Briauc* (Mod. W. Briog) but it does occur in Old Breton, spelt correctly there Brioc but meaning by this */briög/*, which last is more clearly indicated in the Middle Breton *Brieuc*, adopted and petrified in the French form of the place-name, St. Brieuc, though the true Modern Breton is the expected Brieg.

Hypocoristics were specially popular in the names of Celtic “saints”, though by no means limited to them; but a practice which does seem exclusively ecclesiastical is to take the hypocoristic and prefix to it the Late British or Primitive Welsh and Breton (as well as Irish) **mo* “my” or **to* “thy” (both of which would have the effect of changing a following *b-* to *v-*). At the period in question this would have given */tō'vriög/*, and thence Modern Welsh *Dy-friog*, which survives to the present in the place-name Llandyfriog in the south of Cardiganshire, the church of which is dedicated to Briafael/Briog.

4. The cult of St. Briog

The geography of the dedications to him shows that his cult was overwhelmingly Breton. As St. Brieuc, he is famous in Brittany, and the map of dedications to him in E. G. Bowen's *Saints, Seaways, and Settlements in the Celtic Lands*, (Cardiff, 1969), p. 71, shows thirteen of them in Brittany, one in Cornwall, and two (Llandyfriog and St. Briavels), respectively in S. Cardiganshire and Gloucestershire; but none at all any further north.

5. The Life of St. Briog

It is believed to have been composed in the 11th or 12th century, but it is evident it had at least some considerably older source, since the form Briomaglus can hardly be later than about 600; *Coroticiāna* (if that is the reading) for later *Cereticiōn(a)* probably not later than the 8th century, if not even than the early 6th in the matter of the *ā* in *-ana* (but that might easily be influenced by Latin *-anus*); and *Landa* for later **Lanna* is certainly not later than the second half of the 6th century and probably

not later than about 500 or so. The saint himself is said to have lived in the second half of the 5th century and first quarter or so of the 6th; and in that case the *Life* knew a written source not much later than his death, if at all; but whether that amounts to more than the above three names is impossible to say, and it must be exceedingly doubtful that the *Life* as a whole is contemporary.

I am afraid I have had no opportunity to examine it in great detail. Not only the content but also most of the names suggest it was composed in Brittany. Geographically it seems very confused, partly because *Britannia* was often used equally of Britain and Brittany (in spite of the occurrence of *Armorica* also in the *Life*). *Coroticiāna regio* is certainly Cardigan and not S. W. Scotland. *Scene* is, I don't doubt, the well-known Irish *Inber Scēne*, the mouth of the Kenmare River in S. Kerry (see Hogan, *Onomasticon Goidelicum*, Dublin, 1910, s.v.), which is presumably why the Bollandist put the *regio* in Kerry, while at the same time trying to make out that the river was the Shannon (which is in any case not *Scēne* but early Irish *Sinon(n)*, early Latin *Sinona*). But the early British church was of course in very close contact with the Irish one, and the composer of the *Life* might well have heard of *Inber Scēne*, and in some muddled fashion thought it was in Cardigan. As to Brioc's parents, "Cerpus" and "Eldruda", the names mean nothing to me, and it is impossible to say which branch of Celtic they belong to, if any.

With regard to *Landa Magna*, it means, at this date, "Great Church". In British that would be **Landā Mārā*, Late Brit. **Landā* (or *Lanna*) *Mora*, Old Welsh *Lann Maur*, Modern W. *Llanfor*, Old Bret. *Lann Mor*, Mod. Bret. *Lann Meur*. There is a *Llanfor* in Merionethshire, not connected with St. Briafel, but none in Cardigan-shire or the south at all. But I am not sure the *Life* makes it clear that *Landa Magna* was in Britain rather than Brittany, and there is a *Lanmeur* in Brittany, N. E. of Morlaix near the N. coast, though Bowen's map does not include it among dedications to St. Brioc—but there may have been, or indeed may be, for all I know, other *Lanmeurs*.

In any case *Landa Magna* cannot have been *Vindolanda*, which means "The White Enclosure". British **landa*, early "enclosure", later also "church(yard)", is common in placenames in all the Brittonic world, and one would not be justified in identifying *Landa Magna* with *Vindolanda* on the strength of the *landa*.

6. *Can Brigomaglos of Chesterholm be St. Briog?*

Haverfield had heard of Briomaglus/Briog, but, I take it, his "[*qui et Brio*]cus" is nothing but a guess, as is implied in *RIB*, loc. cit. in spite of the somewhat misleading and rather unfortunate "translation" which is given. Whether the identification with St. Briog can in any case be justified is the question. My own view is that it can not, for the following reasons:

- (a) It involves supposing that two people called X living at the same time must be the same person. If it were an excessively *outré* name there might be something to be said for it, but this is not the case here at all.
- (b) St. Briog is quite unknown north of S. Wales, and his cult, which seems to

point unmistakably to Brittany as its centre and place of origin, with a couple of offshoots in S. Britain, may well have had only slight connection with Britain in spite of his Cardigan origin. This is not a bit surprising in the circumstances of the early British church. Nor is it likely the cult would be carried to North Britain, as such a spread was quite exceptional even with cults well-established in Wales. Moreover, the Haverfield theory would demand that Briog himself *died* there, i.e. that he was ever in Northumberland in person; which the *Life* alone, quite apart from other factors, would refute.

(c) The phrase *qui et X* is of course familiar, but I do not know any other examples in the *Inscriptiones Christianae* of Britain. Besides, one may note, e.g. *CIIC*. I, no. 381, in North Wales, *Aliortus Elmetiaco hic iacet*, "Aliortus, an Elfed man, lies here" (Elfed in Wales rather than Elmet in Yorks.), where the *-ācos* adjectival suffix is used, as it often is, in a territorially-identifying sense. The *-VS* of the Chesterholm inscription, if really *-CVS*, could very well be the end of such an identifying form, but as already noted, there is no room on the stone for more than six letters before it. For the word-order, compare *CIIC* I, no. 354, *Corbalengi iacit Ordovs*, "C. lies here, an Ordovician" (cf. *LHEB*, p. 619).

(d) The inscription seems obviously one of a series of post-Roman ones, all of about the same date as Brigomaglos, running southwards from Edinburgh to Chesterholm in a more or less straight line (*CIIC* I, nos. 510, 511, 515, 514, and 498), the distribution of which suggests again the absence of any southern connection. Of these, the only one with any clear mark of Christianity is no. 511 with its cross (*not* a chi-rho monogram, with Macalister); and on the contrary, the two men commemorated in no. 515 were *principes*, not ecclesiastics. The so-called early *Inscriptiones Christianae* of Britain were generally those of laymen, not clergy. Of course, the formulae *hic iacet*, *in tumulo*, etc., in some of the above inscriptions are certainly Christian ones (see V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales*, Cardiff 1950, pp. 8ff.), but there is no implication that those buried there were clerics. The presence of such inscriptions at this period in southern Scotland is no doubt an aspect of the "Ninianic" church in the region in post-Roman times.

(e) In fact, there is no warrant at all in the inscription for Haverfield's unhappy guess.

Thus I think the identification cannot hold water.

