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Museum Note 1997

Five Stones from Great Chesters Fort

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DURING the recording, for English Heritage, of the fabric of the walls, towers and gateways of Great Chesters fort by the author, a number of stones were located and recorded, four of which are now housed in the Museum of Antiquities.

1. At the south gate a shallow relief (fig. 1) was noticed on one of the blocks on the west wall of the east guardchamber. The

relief (35.5×28.5 cm) is carved on the external west face of a limestone block which measures $115 \times 38 \times 32$ cm. The somewhat enigmatic relief appears to be either i) an unfinished phallic symbol, possibly with associated vulva, ii) an incomplete figure with an arm extended towards another figure, or iii) a crudely fashioned relief of the native god Cocidius. Parallels for the first suggestion include examples



Fig. 1

from Corbridge (*CSIR* I.1, nos 175, 176), Chesters (*CSIR* I.6, nos 404, 407), Vindolanda (*CSIR* I.6, no. 449) and Birdoswald (*CSIR* I.6, nos 458, 459, 461). No parallels for the second suggestion are known in the area to date but the silver plaques from Bewcastle (*RIB* 956, 987) may offer stylistic parallels for the third suggestion.

If it is the native god Cocidius which is depicted on this relief it is the first such physical depiction in stone from Hadrian's Wall. Cocidius is identified with both Mars and Silvanus in the Wall region with a number of altars being dedicated to him by commanding officers and soldiers alike.

The west guardroom of the south gate was first exposed in 1894¹ with the east guardroom coming under the spade in 1895.² No mention was made in either of the reports of the relief and a photograph of the east guardroom in the 1903 report in *AA* does not show the block in the position in which it now rests, although there is a stone, which may be the one in question, lying at right angles across the road into the fort. This may have been placed there as part of the blocking of the gateway. The block has been left *in situ*.

2. Museum of Antiquities Acc. No. 1996.14. Fig. 2. This fragment of sculpture was recovered from the topsoil adjacent to the *spina*



Fig. 2



Fig. 3a, b

of the west gate of the fort. The relief is broken diagonally at both top and bottom with a maximum height of 24 cm, a depth of 13 cm, and a width of 27 cm. The surviving piece of relief on the limestone block shows a stylized pair of legs 3 cm apart, 8 cm long and 1.7 cm deep. A border has surrounded the figure to the left of the block. The left lower leg and foot are damaged.

Similarities to this piece can be seen on tombstones, for example from Old Penrith (*RIB* 932) and Great Chesters itself (*RIB* 1747), on reliefs of deities, such as can be seen at Cor-

bridge (*CSIR* I.1, nos 5, 112) and Housesteads (*CSIR* I.6, nos 31, 70, 200), and on altars (see Carvoran: *RIB* 1785).

3. Museum of Antiquities Acc. No. 1996.15. Fig. 3a/b. This buff sandstone block (fig. 3) was found in a field wall by David Sherlock, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, at Great Chesters (grid reference NY 7007 6643). Its maximum length is 39 cm, with a width of 20 cm, and a depth of 13 cm. Tooling marks are visible on four surfaces and the block appears to have been broken at the back and one side. On the longer surviving face a



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

shallow phallus has been pecked out (8 cm long \times 6 cm wide \times 8 mm deep). On the end face an altar is depicted (5.5 cm high \times 3 cm wide) within a recessed niche 8 cm high \times 4.5 cm wide.

4. Museum of Antiquities Acc. No. 1996.16. Fig. 4. This is a "sugarloaf"-shaped block of buff limestone which was found with No. 5 (below) partly buried inside the west gate between the two guardrooms. The block tapers to a maximum height of 38 cm with the top of the pinnacle broken. The section forms roughly three-quarters of a circle with the rear face worked flat with a 10 cm undercut area above the base before the block tapers inwards. Tooling marks are clearly visible.

This block and No. 5 may have been decora-

tive pinnacles to the merlons above the gate³. In the 1903 edition of *AA* stones of similar appearance are pictured at the west gate (plates i and ii) and the north-west angle tower (plate iv).

5. Museum of Antiquities Acc. No. 1996.17. Fig. 5. A "sugar-loaf" shaped buff limestone block, 45 cm high, tapering to form a pinnacle. Tooling marks are visible on all surfaces whilst the base is roughly worked and of a generally square shape.

NOTES

¹ *AA*², XVII (1895) *xxii-xxxii*.

² *AA*², XXIV (1903) 19-64.

³ *AA*², XXIV (1903) 32-3.

