

The ‘Roman Heads’ at the Netherbow in Edinburgh: a case of antiquarian wishful thinking in the 18th and 19th centuries

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ABSTRACT

A sculptured stone panel built into the wall of a house at the Fountain Close near the Netherbow Port of Edinburgh was first noted by Sir John Clerk of Penicuik in 1726 and published by Alexander Gordon that same year. The tablet features two heads, male and female, in profile and facing each other across an inscribed panel bearing a biblical inscription in lettering of Gothic form. The slab is today in the National Museum of Scotland where it is regarded as a work of the 16th century. But in the 18th century the antiquaries of Scotland were anxious to demonstrate that the carved heads were Roman and that they were those of the Emperor Septimius Severus and his consort Julia Domna. The awkwardness of the Gothic text between was simply, and literally, omitted from the engraved record of the stone. The ‘Roman’ view was adhered to into modern times. The case of the sculptured slab stands representative of antiquarian attitudes to the remains of the past across three centuries. The work of many writers of scholarly and popular literature is adduced on both sides of the argument, and derivatives of the portrait heads incorporated in the decoration of Sir Walter Scott’s Abbotsford are discussed.

A high-relief sculptural panel, allegedly representing portrait busts in profile of the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus and his wife Julia Domna, had at some date been inserted into the wall of a building on the south side of the Netherbow (that is the portion of the High Street of Edinburgh just above, or west, of the Netherbow Port, almost opposite ‘John Knox’s House’). This panel, consisting of three distinct parts bordered by a moulding which indicates its unity, is today in the National Museum of Scotland (Illus 1). First mentioned in 1726, it attracted the attention of antiquaries, historians, artists, travel writers and guidebook compilers throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. When this intriguing work first came to public notice it was, and was for long thereafter, deemed of Roman workmanship. Yet in order to arrive at and maintain this view, the antiquaries of 18th-century Scotland had to wish away certain

awkward elements in the sculptured panel. For between the apparently classical portrait heads, which clearly formed the two ends of a single panel, was a further tablet bearing an inscription in Latin, but carved in Gothic letters, consisting of a biblical quotation with its reference. If this text were correctly interpreted, and if it indeed formed part of a single panel integral with the two carved portraits, then the supposedly ‘Roman’ heads of Severus and his consort were nothing of the kind: the portraits were really intended to represent Adam and Eve. And with this identification a much vaunted and hoped-for link with the Roman past of Scotland ceased to have credibility and must be dismissed as so much wishful thinking. That, in turn, was bad news for the man who first mentioned the sculptured stones to his fellow antiquarian acquaintances: Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, second baronet (1676–1755), doyen of Scottish antiquaries of

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ILLUS 1 Sculptured stone panel in three parts, showing two heads in profile on either side of a Latin inscription in Gothic script, 16th century. L: 58mm; W: 500mm; Th: 180mm (per panel). National Museum of Scotland (H.KG.41). © National Museums Scotland

the second quarter of the 18th century and the principal private collector of Roman artefacts from Scottish and northern English sites. And it was, perhaps, equally bad or worse news, if for a different reason, for the man who first published the sculptures: the mercurial and nationalist chronicler of the remains of Roman Scotland, Alexander Gordon (c 1692–1754).

Clerk was not simply the leading Scottish antiquary of the day.¹ He was also the chief exponent and principal apologist of the idea of *Caledonia Romana*. For Sir John, and for like-minded students of antiquity who shared his views, ancient Scotland was a territory that had once been open to the civilising reach of Rome. In subjecting Scotland to incorporation in the Roman Empire, the magnanimous world-conquerors had also offered something in return: they had attempted, however briefly and ineffectually, to rescue the ancient Caledonians from the rude barbarity in which they had previously lived and in which their country would continue to exist in post-Roman times, until the era of the Union of the Parliaments in 1707, which Clerk himself had played a noteworthy part in helping to bring about. Sir John sought out antiquities as evidence of this Roman concern with Scotland. When he found them, he saw them as badges of honour: tokens

of the trouble that immortal Rome had taken in its civilising mission, which the Empire chose to extend even to the benighted inhabitants of Scotland.

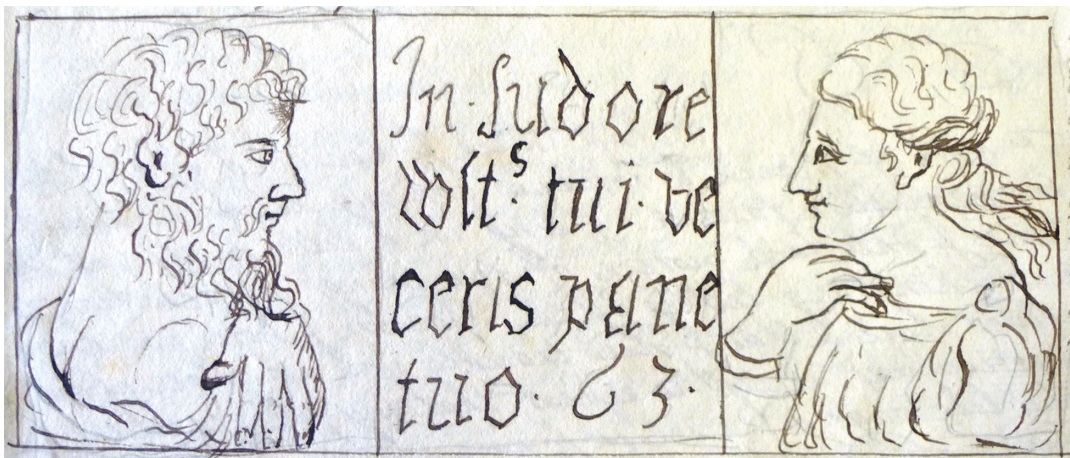
Alexander Gordon, whose efforts in antiquarian endeavour were greatly aided by Clerk's practical patronage and intellectual support, tended by contrast to see those same artefacts and monuments as emblems of slavery.² But, beyond this, Gordon also regarded them as badges of honour – albeit in a manner rather different from that of his patron. To Gordon's mind they showed the efforts to which Rome had gone to attempt conquest: a domination which could not be maintained and which ultimately failed. Roman antiquities, therefore, might be studied as evidence of a people who stubbornly remained free or had ultimately thrown off the Roman yoke. To find Roman antiquities was to find a form of tribute paid by Rome to ancient Caledonia. Such archaeological remains were symbols of conquest and subjection attempted, tokens of Caledonian greatness in the evidence they afforded of a people's power to attract Roman interest in the first place but especially of that people's resolution in the face of potential oppression. Roman forts, weapons, roads and walls: all were evidence of invasion attempted and conquest ultimately repelled. Finds of

Roman antiquities thus pointed not simply to *Roman* civilisation and fortitude in the north but more particularly to *Caledonian* intrepidity in the face of oppression. These two differing views of the same corpus of archaeological material are aspects of the phenomenon which has been called 'Political Antiquarianism' and which can be detected among certain students of Scotland in the Roman period.³ Antiquaries were readily able to identify either with Romans or with Caledonians, depending on their political persuasion around the time of, and subsequent to, the Union, and in accordance with their view of a contemporary England, which in its relationship to Scotland in many ways resembled the Rome of Agricola or Severus. The sculptured heads of the Netherbow furnish an interesting case study of such antiquarian attitudes.

It was Sir John Clerk who first took notice of the sculptured panel. He mentioned it in a letter of 6 March 1726 to his English antiquarian friend Roger Gale. Clerk and Gale had been corresponding about ancient burial and cremation rites in a series of learned letters, some of which Alexander Gordon would later print (much to their authors' annoyance) in the appendix to his *Itinerarium Septentrionale* of 1726. It was in the wider context of this discussion of ancient burials that Clerk wrote:

tho' generally the Roman sepulchres in the Countrey be very mean, yet it wou'd seem they have had sometimes very elegant sarcophagi, of this kind. If I mistake it not, there is one which is built into a house at Edinburgh – but I shall say nothing of it here being to send an exact drawing of it to my Lord Pembroke next post.⁴

Clerk's authorial copy of his letter to Lord Pembroke is indeed dated the next day, 7 March 1726.⁵ It includes in the body of the text Clerk's own rather crude copy of a drawing, the original of which he had sent as a paper apart to the Earl (Illus 2). A note by Sir John vouchsafes the information that the original drawing had been made to his order by 'Mr Alexander the painter'. This is John Alexander, an Aberdonian (like Alexander Gordon), a Catholic and a Jacobite, who had trained in London, Paris and Rome where he had spent 10 years steeped in the classical tradition. John Alexander was by this time back in Scotland and established in Edinburgh as a portrait painter of some competence. Thomas Herbert, eighth Earl of Pembroke, was a major collector of classical sculpture and had greatly increased the display of such material, much of it of dubious authenticity, at his Wiltshire seat of Wilton.⁶ Clerk had known Pembroke since they were Commissioners together for the Treaty of Union; and he knew, too, that Pembroke would



ILLUS 2 Sketch by Sir John Clerk of Penicuik after original drawing by John Alexander, 1726. National Records of Scotland (GD18/5029). Sir Robert Clerk of Penicuik, Bt

be interested in such a relic and that he might look favourably upon it. An additional motive in sending his letter and Alexander's drawing was perhaps to ingratiate himself further with the 'antiquarian lords and gentlemen' of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Clerk had been elected a Fellow the previous March: he was indeed the first Scotsman resident in Scotland to be elected to the Society. Gordon was a protégé of Pembroke, and it may well be that it was through Pembroke that Gordon had been introduced to Clerk in the first place.⁷

The significant part of Clerk's letter both describes and speculates on the sculptured panel:

I take it to be part of a Roman Sarcophagus or Sepulchral urne & that these words in Saxon letters *in sudore vultus tui vesceris pane tuo* have been put between the two figures in place of the usual inscription erased or otherways that the letters make a separate stone as is more probable. Nota: the stone is a little above the Netherbow Port south side of the street. This piece of Antiquity is built into a house on the high street of Edinburgh & is about 18 or 20 feet from the ground. The drawing does not come up to the original in beauty but is very well considering the distance it was taken at, Your Lordship who is a very great judge in all the excellencies of Art will easily perceive that the sculpture is of the highest taste & from many figures of the same kind in Graevius & Montfaucon's Antiquities will be led into the opinion of its being truly Roman.⁸ I believe it has been placed here by some ignorant Artificer who took it to be a Representation of Adam & Eve and therefore clapt in the words from the 3rd Chapter of Genesis 19 ver.: *in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread*. I cannot acquaint your Lordship where it was found only 'tis probable that it came from no forreign parts, for about the time of the building this house no body lookt after such curiosities in this Country, but if after all I have said it happen not to be Roman but Saxon or Gothick I shall look upon it still as a most valouable curiosity for I doubt if any age between the 3rd century and the 15 can show any thing like it ...

Clerk was also the first to transcribe the inscription and to identify its biblical source. That led him to retail the popular belief that the portraits were intended to be those of Adam and Eve. He described the letters of the inscription as

'Saxon'. He would later describe the lettering of what he called the 'frize' (or frieze) on the north wall of Rosslyn Chapel, which contains a cryptic record of the building's founder and the date of his creation, as being 'written in a Saxon alphabet of the 13 & 14 centuries'.⁹ 'Gothick' was a term, largely pejorative, which Clerk used for anything that was not Roman or that defied classical principles of proportion, design, taste, manners, or pretty well anything that he himself disliked or dismissed as barbaric. In the context of that same Rosslyn inscription and associated carved symbols, Clerk once suggested that Alexander Gordon might be able to make something of them were he to 'carry them to some of his old Gothick acquaintances' among the medievalists then dominating the Society of Antiquaries.¹⁰ What is most important of all, however, is the fact that Clerk appears to concede the possibility that the heads might not in fact be Roman at all, but rather of later, uncertain date.

It is interesting to note that the drawing which Clerk had bespoken was never submitted to the Society of Antiquaries. Sir John had already communicated at least one supposedly Roman antiquity to the Society. Others would follow, as would papers on a variety of topics. But there is no record in the Antiquaries' minute-book, or in the private memoranda of such antiquarian interchange of information and ideas kept by William Stukeley, of the Netherbow heads. Nor is there any mention of the sculptures in the correspondence of Clerk and Gordon preserved in the Clerk Muniments; nor, for that matter, any further mention in correspondence between Clerk and Roger Gale. These facts are surprising; and the silence may lead us to wonder if doubts had arisen. But Lord Pembroke may simply have kept Sir John's drawing *in petto*, because he had an immediate purpose for it.

That purpose was to pass the drawing to Alexander Gordon. Clerk may well have intended that Lord Pembroke himself do this.¹¹ It is perhaps odd that Clerk did not simply send John Alexander's drawing to Gordon in the first instance. However it is likely that Clerk had the primary purpose of currying favour with 'Carvilius Magnus', as Pembroke was known in William Stukeley's extraordinary Society of

Roman Knights, in which whimsical antiquarian assembly both Clerk and Gordon had their places as, respectively, 'Agricola' and 'Galgacus'.¹² He allowed Pembroke to play the middleman in this episode in antiquarian commerce and to convey the details of the stones to Gordon so that Gordon (as Pembroke's man) might effect publication. This is precisely what happened; Gordon published the image of the sculptures, in an engraving after John Alexander's original, post-haste in the appendix to his *Itinerarium Septentrionale* that spring.

Gordon must have been delighted to be able to add this antiquity to his appendix. He wrote thus: 'I have lately been favour'd with a Draught of two very curious Heads, built up in a wall in Edinburgh, the Sculpture of which is so excellent, that I have been advis'd, by the best Judges of Antiquity, to give it a Place in my Book.' A description of the sculptures in 'Mezzo Relievo' followed:

They are attir'd in *Roman Habits*, and are, indisputably, Works of that Nation; notwithstanding, it appears that the Stone has been cut asunder in the Middle, and a *Gothick* Inscription, in the Monkish Times, thrust in betwixt them. Some have imagined this to have been originally design'd for a *Sarcophagus*; many Heads of the like Kind appearing upon *Sarcophagi*, in *Montfaucon*, and other Books of Antiquity; but a very learned and illustrious Antiquary here, by the Ideas of the Heads, judges them like Representations of the Emperor *Septimus Severus*, and his Wife *Julia*. This is highly probable, and consistent with *Roman History*; for, that the Emperor, and most of his August Family were in *Scotland*, appears plain in *Xephiline*, from *Dio*, as I have already mention'd, in the 104th page of this Work. The Figures, as they were design'd by the ingenious Mr *Alexander*, of *Edinburgh*, see in Plate III. Fig. I.¹³

The thought will immediately strike the reader: how was it that Gordon himself had never seen, or had his attention drawn to, this panel when he was in Edinburgh in the course of research for his book? How was it that no previous antiquary had ever remarked upon it? Here was a large (approximately 58cm x 150cm) sculpture of some apparent antiquity, and of a form which immediately suggested a Roman

sarcophagus panel; indeed the male figure, with its curly hair and full, straggly beard, does bear some resemblance to coin portraits of Severus (although the female bust, with its long flowing locks, looks almost nothing like Julia Domna, who is normally identified by her distinctive helmet-like wig). It was also lodged prominently 'in plain sight' in the wall of a house on or adjoining the principal street of a capital city. And yet Sir John Clerk, apparently out of the blue, suddenly comes to mention it in a letter in 1726.

It will be noted that the identification of the heads with Severus and his consort did not originate with Clerk (who had gone into no iconographical speculation), though the possible connection with a sarcophagus panel and the suggestion of comparative material in Montfaucon did. The 'very learned and illustrious antiquary here' is not Clerk as might be (and indeed has been) imagined, but rather someone in London, where Gordon then was.¹⁴ Pembroke himself is the most probable candidate. And it was Gordon who related the sculpture to the Severan period and to the expedition of the Emperor to the North, on which occasion the Empress accompanied her husband, as recorded in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*; Dio tells a (presumably apocryphal) story about an interchange between Julia Domna and the wife of a Caledonian chieftain, Argentocoxus, when the two women are supposed to have discussed sexual mores, with the Caledonian claiming moral superiority in these matters.¹⁵

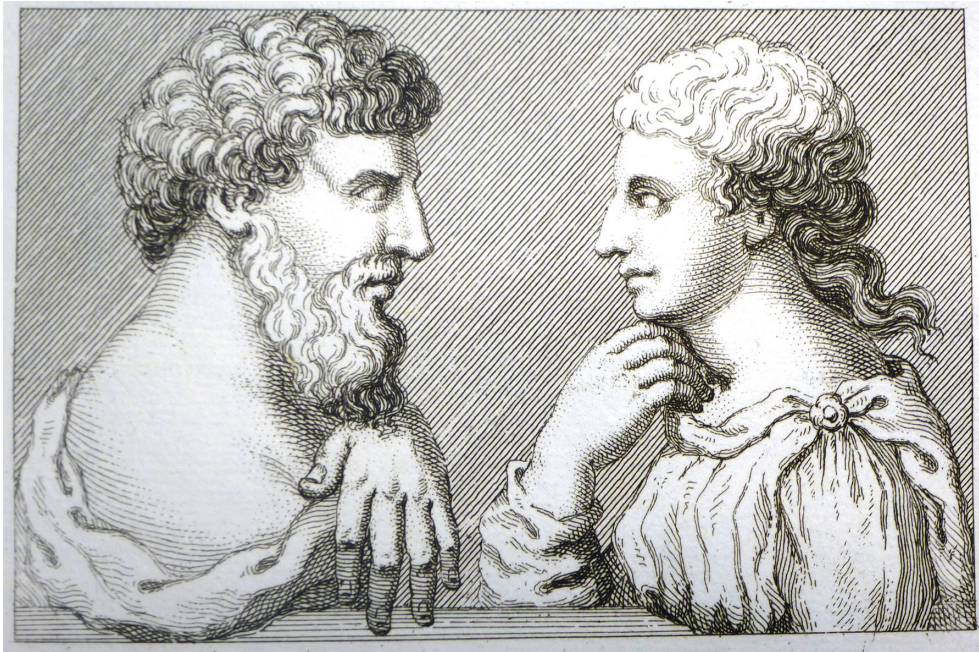
In a manuscript note on page 186 of his own copy of the *Itinerarium* (recently re-discovered and now in the National Library of Scotland¹⁶) Clerk enlarged a little on the location of the tablet, allowing us to home-in on the spot. Having set down the fact of his having sent the drawing of the heads to Pembroke, 'who communicated them to the author' (that is Gordon), Clerk stated that, 'The stones are at present built into a house above the Fountain closs [Close] on the High Street of Edin.' Then there is the confident statement: 'This is the finest piece of sculpture in this country.' Quite a claim, though presumably Clerk was measuring it against other 'Roman' work, such as the inscribed stones from

the Antonine Wall in the College of Glasgow rather than against anything of more recent date, such as Van Nost's Queensberry monument in Durisdeer Church – which Clerk must have known well through his close connection with the Douglas family.¹⁷ In Gordon's passage noting how the panel had been 'cut asunder ... in the Monkish Times' and a 'Gothick Inscription ... thrust in betwixt' Clerk underlined 'Gothick' in the text, as if to dispute its use, and then noted this against it: 'The middle stone contains these words in Saxon letters: *In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane tuo*, but this stone is either different from the two heads, or if the same, then the inscription has been added many years after.' Clerk was therefore alert to these possibilities: the erasure of an original Roman inscription and its later replacement; or the insertion between the 'Roman' portraits of a later inscription on a separate stone, unrelated to the original heads, except for the purpose of re-identifying (or 're-branding') them as Adam and Eve. What could not be in doubt was the inappropriate and awkward appearance of a biblical phrase on an

allegedly 3rd-century Roman sculpture. The essential antiquity of the heads was not a fact that Clerk appeared to have doubted. He preferred to believe that whoever built them into the wall in the Netherbow must have taken them to be Adam and Eve, this misidentification inspiring the addition of the biblical text.

The illustration that Gordon provided (Illus 3) is significantly different from the drawing by John Alexander that Pembroke had given him. The central portion containing the biblical text in its Gothic lettering has disappeared – as surely as a Soviet leader who had fallen out of favour with the Party might have been excised from a group photograph – and the two side portions of the entire tablet bearing the portrait busts have been shunted together. It would be another 99 years before the existence of the troublesome inscription would be admitted again in any visual record. And, as we shall see, the iconography of the panel would have a fascinating subsequent history.

It is interesting to note that the relief is not mentioned in John Horsley's *Britannia Romana*



ILLUS 3 Engraving by Alexander Gordon from *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, 1726, Plate 3. Dr Andrew Fraser

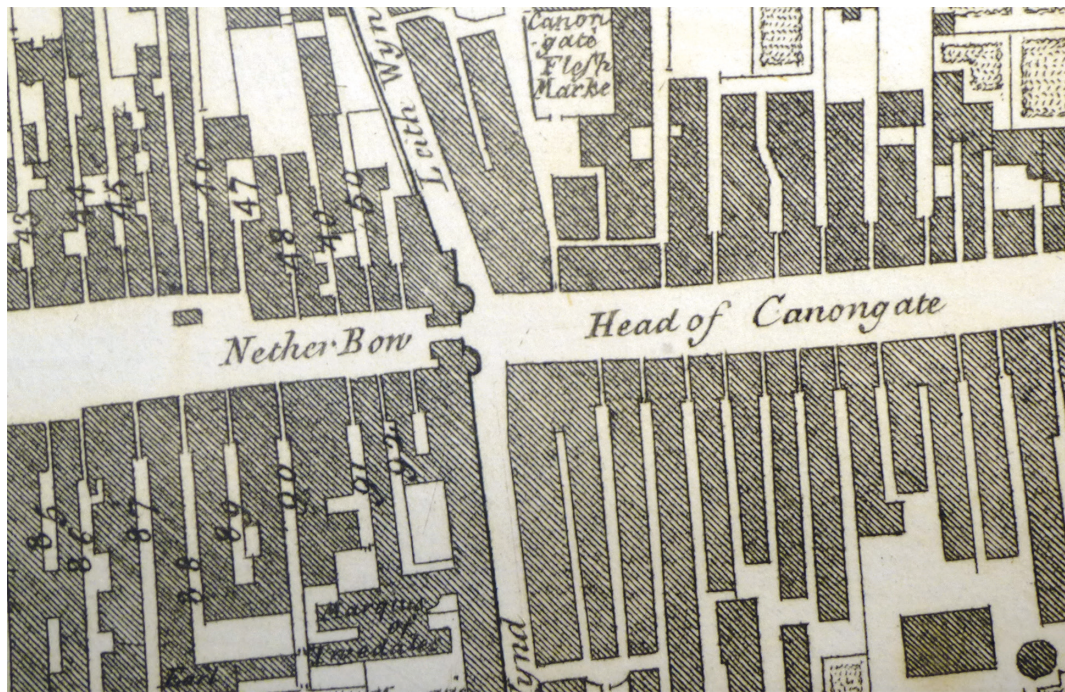
(1732), despite the fact that he would surely have seen it during his visit to Edinburgh on research for his great treatise, when he was assisted by Sir John Clerk. Surely Clerk must have brought it to his attention, if, that is, by that time Clerk himself still believed it to be Roman. Nor was the tablet ever mentioned in their correspondence. This would suggest that Horsley, fine scholar that he was, had reservations about the antiquity of the relief. The meticulous Horsley surely had his reasons for omitting the relief from an otherwise comprehensive account of Romano-British history and antiquities. It should be admitted, too, that Clerk himself never mentions the Fountain Close tablet again, even when telling Roger Gale about a so-called Roman arch in the same general vicinity ('that nobody ever imagined to be Roman, yet it seems it was, by an urn discovered in it, with a good many silver coins ...'¹⁸) which had recently been demolished. Gale often cautioned against enthusiastic antiquaries labelling things Roman when incontrovertible evidence and strong likelihood were lacking. Possibly Clerk heeded the warning, despite his inclination to believe the improbable. Horsley, too, suggested in correspondence with Clerk that he was aware that a temptation to find Roman sites and Roman artefacts existed, going so far as to imply that if one expected to find such, in time one tended to do so!¹⁹ For his part, Gordon is on record as saying that in his antiquarian work he aimed 'to do justice to my country in applying these Monuments of Roman Antiquity in order to show them as lasting trophies of the invincible valure of our noble prediccursors'.²⁰ Roman remains spoke volumes about Caledonian perseverance. Such a piece of sculpture as the Netherbow heads *had* to be Roman if Gordon's crusade in political antiquarianism was to succeed; anything else would just not cut the mustard in the same way.

The Fountain Close can be identified (numbered '90') on William Edgar's map of Edinburgh of 1742 (Illus 4), found in William Maitland's *History of Edinburgh* of 1753. Maitland himself mentions the heads, expanding considerably on their siting and their history, especially on the reason for their being popularly believed to represent Adam and Eve. Whereas Clerk had described the heads as being carved

in 'Bass Relief' and Gordon as in '*Mezzo Relievo*', Maitland opted for '*Alto-relievo*' (the actual nature of the relief carving, and its technical description, differs in many subsequent accounts of the heads): he also made clear, as the others had not (though it must have been taken for granted), that the heads were portraits in '*Profil*'. What were said 'by People' to be heads of Adam and Eve had been removed to their current position from the wall of a house on the opposite, northern side of the street. The 'Form of the Table, on which the Busts were cut, is altered; and being halved, the Heads are divided, and a Stone fitted to the original Border inserted, whereon are engraven the following Words in *Gothick* characters and not in Saxon, as generally asserted, viz. *In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane, anno 1621*, That is, In the sweat of thy Face shalt thou eat Bread.' Maitland thus returned to the Latin Vulgate to offer a slight variant of Clerk's original reading. He did not get this from Gordon, who had not in fact published the text of the inscription. Maitland possibly derived the information from Clerk (Clerk and Gale hoped he might prove 'a second Camden'²¹), but supplied the reading of the final words as a date. Nor did Gordon say that the text was in 'Saxon' letters. Clerk only had done that. Maybe Clerk had shown Maitland his original letter to Pembroke. The fact that the words were derived from 'the scriptural History of *Adam* and *Eve*' suggested to Maitland that the busts had come to be regarded as of those characters. But Maitland was adamant that they were not.

These Stones being in a Wall over a Baker's shop, I imagine they were put up by one of that Profession, who, taking them to be the Heads of the said *Adam* and *Eve*, added the above Inscription, in some measure, alluding to his Trade; but whoever at first conferred on them those Names are greatly mistaken; for *Adam* and *Eve* were both naked, other than their Coats of Skins, notwithstanding of which they are both carved and painted naked; whereas the said Busts are clothed with the *Roman Chlamis*, which, with their elegant Sculpture, manifestly shews them to owe their Origin to that Nation.

Antiquaries, wrote Maitland, thought the images to be Severus and Julia Domna, and for the first



ILLUS 4 Map of Edinburgh by William Edgar, published in William Maitland, *The History of Edinburgh*, 1753. Detail showing location of the head of the Fountain Close (numbered 90) where it meets the High Street almost opposite the so-called John Knox House. Dr Andrew Fraser

time he adduced the evidence of coin portraits of the pair as suggesting this identification.²²

Thomas Pennant mentioned the tablet in his *Tour in Scotland*, describing it as two fine profile heads, of Roman workmanship, supposed to be those of Severus and Julia but mistaken for Adam and Eve. Though he had clearly seen them in situ, and despite referring to the inscription between the heads, Pennant nevertheless described them as 'well engraven' in Gordon's *Itinerarium*.²³ Here, as we have noted, the actual evidence of the stones had been imaginatively amended so that the apparently anachronistic central inscription was expunged. The same thing happened, though with a higher level of artistry, in an etching and aquatint print produced by David Allan in 1783. The copy in the British Museum bears contemporary manuscript annotations identifying the subjects as Severus and Julia Domna (Illus 5). The print was subsequently said to have been made 'at the suggestion, if not at the expense, of the [late] Earl of Buchan' for distribution by the Society

of Antiquaries of Scotland, although this did not in fact happen until almost half a century later.²⁴ The differences between Alexander's drawing (as we know it from Clerk's copy), the print after it in Gordon's *Itinerarium* and Allan's print of the same sculpture reveal how much artistic licence was taken in the recording of the sculptures. Whereas on the one hand Clerk's copy shows that Alexander's drawing of the panel included the central section with its Gothic inscription, on the other both Gordon's engraving and Allan's etching omit what was believed to be the post-Roman addition, and thus attempt to re-create what was believed to be the original composition. In Allan's version an entirely fictitious 'crack' has also been inserted so as to suggest that the two heads had never been separated by any other feature; the chipped fillets at top and bottom are picturesque antiquarian details worthy of Piranesi. Although Clerk tried to excuse the fact that Alexander's drawing 'does not come up to the original in beauty' by explaining that the

sculpture was situated at some height above the ground with the implication that it was therefore difficult to inspect closely, there is no doubt that later representations intentionally manipulated the image to render the carvings more characteristically 'Roman'. As a rider to this, a remarkable letter of Sir James Foulis of Colinton to Thomas Pennant, published in an Edinburgh magazine in 1793 but possibly written earlier, may be quoted.²⁵ 'You have taken the account of the two heads ... from some blundering author. There is no such inscription as you mention.' Not only was the inscription suppressed in graphic representations; a local antiquary even managed to convince himself it was not actually there!

An entry in the minutes of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland is too close in date to the time of the making of David Allan's aquatint

for the two events not to be in some measure connected. On 4 March 1783 a 'Mr Thornton' is recorded as having presented to the Society 'plaister casts' of the heads. These, 'as large as life' had been taken from 'that masterly peice [sic] of Roman sculpture' in the house front above the Fountain Close at the Netherbow. The donor's identity can be revealed by some searching in the Antiquaries' minutes and in the contemporary volume recording communications to the Society at that early period of its history.²⁶ 'Mr Thornton' is William Thornton, 'of Tortola', who had been admitted as a corresponding member on 2 April 1782.²⁷ A young medical student from a plantation-owning family in the British Virgin Islands, Thornton was a polymath in the making. He had already communicated to the Society a paper on methods of embalming birds.²⁸ He would



ILLUS 5 Aquatint by David Allan, 1783. This image is licensed by the British Museum under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence

go on, having taken United States citizenship, to do many rather more significant things, including becoming an outstanding amateur of architecture – in which capacity he would conceive the original design of no less a building than the US Capitol in Washington, DC.

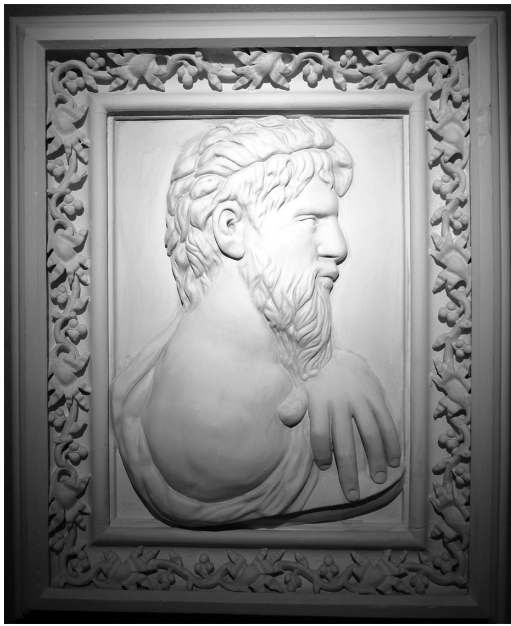
Maitland's account of the sculptures, and his reading of the inscription, informed all subsequent reference to the work in numerous publications over the next century and a half. Hugo Arnot, however, set them more particularly in the context of emblematically decorated Edinburgh buildings. 'In all the old houses of Edinburgh, it is to be remarked, that the superstition of the times had guarded each house with certain cabalistical characters, or talismans, engraved upon its front. These were generally composed of some text of scripture, of the name of God, or perhaps of an emblematical representation of the resurrection.' The house 'a little below Gray's Close' – the given location being very much in Clerk's Fountain Close area, as the two entries off the High Street were juxtaposed, Gray's Close being 87 on Edgar's map – was ornamented with the heads of Severus and Julia 'in beautiful antique workmanship'. These the baker had 'converted' to Adam and Eve, the heads being 'fitted ... in a stone'. 'Ever since,' Arnot wrote, 'they have passed with the vulgar for our primeval parents.'²⁹

Alexander Campbell took account of the heads in his Scottish travelogue of 1802, following Maitland in declaring them to be carved in high relief, and citing the numismatic evidence for the supposition that they represented the Emperor and Empress. No mention of the inscription, or of Adam and Eve, intruded upon what were 'esteemed by antiquaries genuine' and of a 'masterly' workmanship. The location Campbell gives as 'nearly opposite the Fountain Well' helps to identify the site in the Royal Mile in the vicinity of 'John Knox's House'.³⁰ The notice of the heads in Richard Gough's edition of Camden's *Britannia* is essentially derived from Arnot but with the old sarcophagus idea which can be traced to Gordon and ultimately Clerk, and with the additional analysis that the 'beautiful heads' had been 'separated with a text that makes them Adam and Eve'.³¹ Sir John Carr

helpfully added the precise reference, 'Gen. iii, 19' to his 'reading' of the inscription.³²

A fragmentary letter of the landscape painter and drawing master George Walker to the Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, dated 9 February 1802 but not published until nearly 30 years later, adds an interesting further level of appreciation of the sculptures in the first years of the new century. Walker was writing in the general context of concern for 'the state of the fine arts in this country at various periods, at least so far as relates to architectural design, and the efforts of sculpture therein exhibited'. He focused, among other instances, on the 'Roman heads ... opposite the Fountain Well', which (he thought) deserved 'some attention'. Apparently by order of the Duke of Buccleuch, 'a mould was taken of them some time since; and I believe the Society are in possession of a plaster cast of it. I have not, however, heard whether any account has ever been given of them.'³³

Whether or not the Duke of Buccleuch did have these moulds made, it is certain that his kinsman Sir Walter Scott somehow obtained plaster replicas (possibly casts) of the original sculptures which were used in the decoration of the so-called Religious Corridor at Abbotsford (Illus 6 and 7). The hand of Scott's decorator George Bullock may perhaps be detected here. But there is no documentation relating to Scott's choice of these particular images or to his commissioning of them, and they are not specifically referred to in Scott's correspondence. Bullock certainly (as Clive Wainwright has said) 'translated' medieval carvings from Melrose into 'suitable ornaments' for the Armoury ceiling at Abbotsford. But these particular ornamental features appear nowhere in the literature on Bullock and his *oeuvre*.³⁴ Of Bullock, a man (as Scott wrote) 'distinguished by his uncommon taste and talent', the Laird of Abbotsford further wrote that he had 'made several casts with his own hands – masks, and so forth, delightful for cornices, etc'.³⁵ It must remain a matter for speculation whether the two Netherbow Heads can possibly be accounted for among the 32 'plaister casts from ancient carved scriptural and other subjects' sold at the Bullock stock-in-trade sale at Christie's, 15 May

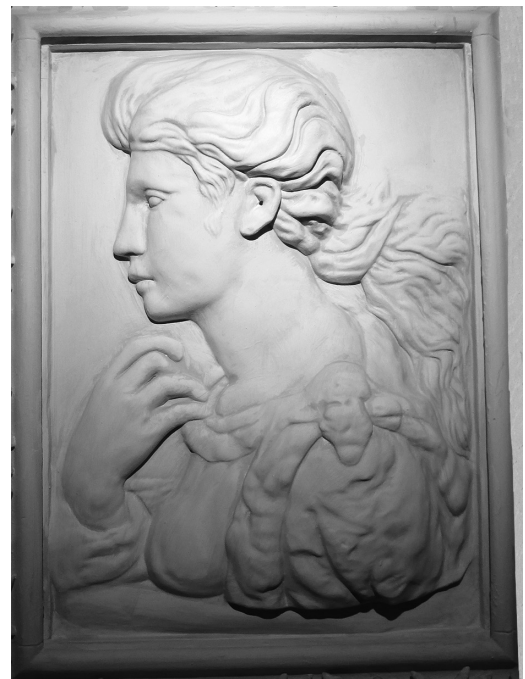


ILLUS 6 Plaster cast of the male head at Abbotsford. By permission of the Abbotsford Trust. The positioning of the Netherbow casts in Scott's 'Religious' corridor at Abbotsford makes them difficult to photograph due to the dimensions of the space

1819, as Lot 26. Indeed, the heads at Abbotsford may equally well have nothing at all to do with Bullock. It is always possible that Scott may have managed to get hold of William Thornton's 'casts' from the Society of Antiquaries' museum and to have put them to good use at Abbotsford. Scott was, after all, not just a figure in a unique position of national, social and literary authority, but one who was known to attract all manner of donations to himself, and to find uses for the lumber of antiquity in ways that passed other men by. All we can really say is that at some point (perhaps even post-1832) these versions of the Netherbow heads appeared set into the wall of the Religious Corridor in close proximity to the plaster ribs of its pseudo-Gothic vaulting and to the angel corbels thereof. Both the heads are furnished with plaster frames of a vaguely medieval foliage pattern. Probably Scott had taken little interest as to the precise sources of the decorative features which were supplied

to him, beyond his satisfaction, as expressed in 1818, that some of these details came in the form of innumerable casts from Melrose 'and other places, of pure Gothic antiquity'.³⁶ So the supposed 'Roman-ness' of the Netherbow heads will have been allowed to fade into the equally fanciful gothic vision that was Abbotsford; and the genuine late medieval or early modern elements of the original sculptural ensemble proved sufficient to earn the portraits a place in the theatrical setting of the Wizard of the North's Conundrum Castle.

Despite the fact that interest in Roman Scotland was to wane in the 19th century as visions of the nation's past were (at least partly under Scott's influence) rendered more romantically 'tartanified', the 'Roman Heads' regularly make their appearance in the rash of Edinburgh travel guides and shorter histories which were published from the early 1800s, no doubt thanks to both their prominent location and the enduring belief that they represented the greatest piece of ancient sculpture that Scotland



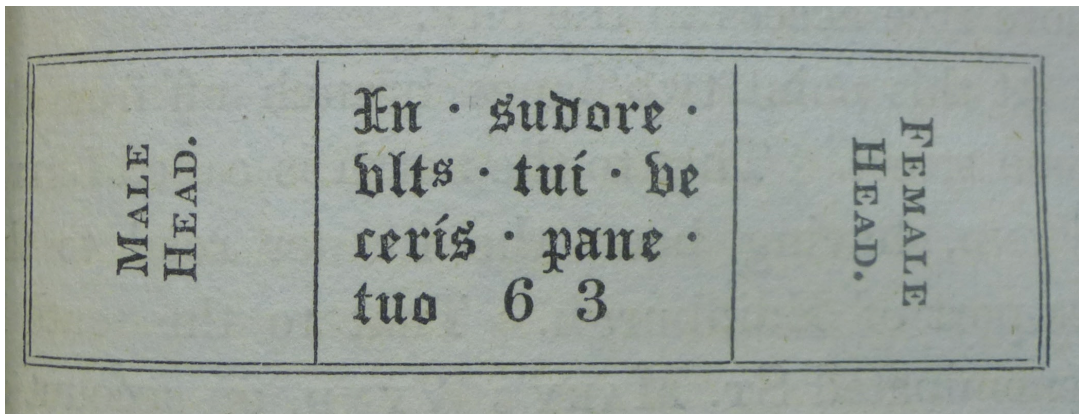
ILLUS 7 Plaster cast of the female head at Abbotsford. By permission of the Abbotsford Trust

had to offer. The yellowing pages of Maitland seem the usual source. The bibliography of these guides is complicated, with, for example, Stark's *Picture of Edinburgh* actually being exactly contemporary with the so-titled *New Picture of Edinburgh*. Stark's first edition of 1806 was furnished with a woodcut of the heads (confidently entitled 'ROMAN SCULPTURE') in which they appear as a remarkably ugly couple with similar noses, a new hair-style for 'Severus' and a rather fetching floral dress pin for 'Julia' (Illus 8).³⁷ By the fourth edition of 1825, the woodcut had been dropped, though the text of the inscription remains (pp 95–6). In the fifth edition ('Improved') of 1831 (pp 100–1), the descriptive matter about the heads remains, but even the biblical inscription has been excised, presumably in order to free up space to deal with the many developments worthy of note in the Athens of the North. In the sixth edition (1838), the description is pared down

to a mere nine lines (p 98), with everything about bakers, Adam and Eve, supposed dates, etc, falling victim to the blue pencil so that only the supposed *Romanitas* of the heads and the now unexplained oddity of the incongruous inscription remain. In the *New Picture of Edinburgh*, notice of the sculptures occurs in the context of discussion of the fabric of the city and the stone buildings of the Old Town, so frequently ornamented with carved or sculptural detail. The Romans were 'metamorphosed' into the first couple, and 'they still pass with the Ignorant for what the whimsical baker thought proper to represent them'.³⁸ In 1806, Stark had printed the inscription with the figures '63' at the end where Maitland had read the date '1621'. The identification of the heads as Adam and Eve was 'now generally believed to be a mistake, the middle stone tablet ... being discovered to have been inserted at a period long subsequent to that in which the figures are supposed to have been



ILLUS 8 Woodcut in Stark's *Picture of Edinburgh*, 1806. Dr Andrew Fraser



ILLUS 9 Diagram of the panel as devised by Robert Chambers for his *Walks in Edinburgh*, 1825. Dr Andrew Fraser

formed'. A dig at the begetter of the mistake cannot be resisted: 'the honest baker, whose reading in history extended not perhaps much farther than the Sacred Volume ... might have added this inscription in allusion to his trade'.

Disappointingly, and perhaps surprisingly given that he would note curiosities such as the Egyptian mummy in the Advocates' Library, Robert Forsyth chose not to dignify the sculptures with inclusion in his *Beauties of Scotland* (1805–8). But they were not beneath the notice of *The Scientific Tourist through England, Wales and Scotland*, compiled by Thomas Walford in 1818.³⁹ The distinguished artist and Grand Tour writer Hugh William Williams, who did much to confirm the growing idea that Edinburgh was another Athens, was moved to recollect these antiquities in his home city even when surrounded by the wonders of Rome itself. There he found ancient sarcophagi used 'as cisterns for horses, and many very beautiful remains of sculpture built in the walls. The finest have been transferred to Canova's studio, and consist of figures, heads, friezes, and other interesting fragments, such as you would covet; but none of them are superior to that of Severus and Julia in the Netherbow of Edinburgh, which is unaccountably allowed to remain where it might be injured by frost and other causes.'⁴⁰ Robert Chambers hit on a cunning way to represent the panel diagrammatically without the need for a wood engraving of the actual sculpture (Illus 9).

The central tablet had been 'interposed by some modern' in the belief that the heads were 'our first parents'. But Chambers appears less than certain that the sculptures were actually Roman, and says no more.⁴¹

David Allan's print of 1783 was eventually placed in the public domain by David Laing in 1831. The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland had a quantity of Allan's etchings still in its possession, and these were finally disposed of by being published as a plate in the *Archaeologia Scotica: or Transactions of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Vol III with accompanying notes by Laing. As has been stated above, Lord Buchan seems to have been the instigator of this visual record of what Laing described as 'one of the curiosities of Edinburgh'. Referring back to Gordon and to Maitland, Laing ventured the opinion that the inscription might have come from one of 'the old monastic establishments of Edinburgh', suggesting that the 'malediction pronounced on our Primeval Parents' had given rise to the tradition that Adam and Eve were the characters represented. It is important to stress that Laing nowhere doubts that the sculptures were genuinely Roman. The iconographic parallel with Severan coins was compelling, as was the fact that 'the Romans were not much accustomed to represent ideal heads in their sculpture' so that actual portraiture was very likely intended, particularly as an Empress's visit was an unusual occurrence.⁴²

Hard on the heels of Laing's publication of the Allan print comes a most interesting record of the stones – perhaps, indeed, the most interesting of all such graphic records (Illus 10). Alexander Archer is a little-known artist who made a series of drawings of Old Edinburgh, some of which (this included) came into the possession of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland: they are now in the National Museum of Scotland. This drawing, with its sense of *sic transit*, shows the slab in situ, by Archer's time above a ham curer's establishment, with a shoe-maker's shop in the 'laigh' premises. Archer entitled his work as follows: 'Old land head of Cannongate [sic], with

ancient stone said to have been on the gateway of the city, representing the Roman Emperor "Severus & his consort Julia". Archer records that he had drawn his view on the spot 'from the object [ie the sculptural panel] itself' on 20 May 1836.⁴³

John Willox described 'a slab of stone', having the two heads upon it, which he said, were 'with much probability' supposed to be 'of Roman origin'. The belief that they had been in some way 'fitted into another stone' to ensure their re-christening as Adam and Eve was again retailed. The erstwhile ignorant baker who effected the transformation was now the 'erudite



ILLUS 10 Drawing of the slab in 1836 by Alexander Archer. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Archer Drawings, sheet 93. National Museum of Scotland Library

possessor' of the images.⁴⁴ William Rhind, in 1851, declared them to be in bas-relief. But they were still 'of Roman origin'.⁴⁵ Whereas *Menzies' Tourist's Pocket Guide for Scotland* noted the 'medallion sculpture' as 'an undoubted Roman antique',⁴⁶ *McDowall's New Guide in Edinburgh* (1851) seems, on page 36, to be the first publication to do two things: to suggest an element of doubt as to the identification of the heads as Severus and Julia (and perhaps also to question their classical antiquity at all?) and to reference the specific source of the biblical inscription in the Gutenberg Bible of 1455. That odd final letter and figure are now confidently changed from Maitland's date of '1621' to 'G.3' [in Gothic font], ie Genesis 3.⁴⁷

Daniel Wilson's seminal *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* was also published in 1851. For him the heads were 'the most beautiful specimen of Roman sculpture existing in Scotland', and undoubtedly representations of Severus and Julia. The inscription 'intercalated' between the heads was 'of 15th century date'. The sculptures must have come from a memorial to the imperial visit to Scotland; and Wilson waxed lyrical about Severus having stood near the spot where the Roman road had crossed the High Street ridge not far from where the sculptures were now set.⁴⁸ Perhaps his confidence was inspired by the discovery of two denarii of Severus 'near the Netherbow' in 1850. Daniel Wilson observed that Robert Stuart, author of the important *Caledonia Romana* (1845), had omitted to take notice of the sculptures. This was indeed so; but Stuart may have had his reasons, as Horsley had more than a century before. However, doubtless spurred by Wilson's criticism, David Thomson, editor of the second edition of Stuart's *Caledonia Romana* (1852), duly included them as 'probably the most curious of all these Roman relics found in the Scottish metropolis ... well known, but, hitherto, too much neglected, objects ...' The 'learned and illustrious antiquary' who had advised Alexander Gordon in 1726 is identified (incorrectly, as has been shown above) as Sir John Clerk. Plate XVI of this second edition of *Caledonia Romana* displayed the heads in a lithograph after the David Allan print. All was

adduced to show that Edinburgh had been a Roman post.⁴⁹

In the second half of the 19th century, certainty about the Roman origin of the heads continued,⁵⁰ but certainty came to be balanced by the gradual appearance of some element of dubiety. The author of a historical and descriptive guide to the city writes of 'a curious piece of sculpture in sharp and fine relief, regarding which we can give no satisfactory explanation. It is alleged, upon what seems tolerably good authority, that the heads are those of the Roman Emperor Septimus [sic] Severus and his wife Julia ... and it is supposed that this tablet may have been found in the ground to the north of the High Street, along which a Roman road extended.'⁵¹ John Wilson adds the dubious 'fact' that the sculpture was 'supposed to have been dug from the neighbouring ground at the making of foundations', and places it among other supposed evidence of Roman activity on the site of Edinburgh.⁵² James Anderson offers the sculptures, along with the presence of other Roman activity in the area, as evidence for a Roman *colonia* on the site of Edinburgh.⁵³ William Rhind locates the sculpture 'at the head of Fountain Close (No 28), on the west side' on the wall of a house 'supposed to have been that of Thomas Bassendyne, a printer of the sixteenth century': the first time this information enters the literature where it would later become a fixture.⁵⁴ By 1867, the sculptures had apparently been removed from the building, with John Hill Burton noting their fine quality and also observing that 'very few other specimens [of Roman sculpture in Scotland] reach nearly the level of these sculptured heads'.⁵⁵ That same year, a historian very inferior to Hill Burton, the Reverend James Mackenzie, illustrates the sculptures in his own *History of Scotland*, and gives an evocative and emotional description of the reliefs and their present sad condition:

On the long sloping ridge which forms the back-bone of Edinburgh, there was a Roman military station ... The military at the post erected a memorial of the visit of Severus. This memorial pillar bore in beautiful sculpture two profile heads, life size, portraits of the Emperor and his Empress Julia. On the front of an old tenement in the Netherbow of Edinburgh, over against John Knox's house, these

sculptured faces are still to be seen, except when the features of the Emperor of the world are covered by a board, offering in staring letters cheap teas to the denizens of the Canongate. Look up at that old stern face with its aspect of high command, and think what changes have passed over this spot since he, whose stony eyes yet gaze forth upon it, was hailed here by his soldiery with a shout which work the echoes of the surrounding forest!⁵⁶

A footnote states that the sculpture had recently been removed to the 'Museum of the Scottish Antiquaries'. One would not know this fact from Grant's *Old and New Edinburgh* where the heads are still described as built into the house wall; nor is any doubt expressed as to their Roman antiquity.⁵⁷

The second, enlarged edition of Hill Burton's *History* continued to commend the sculptures, even though they were no longer visible as part of the fabric of Old Edinburgh. They were 'very fine works of art, and they have an air that at once stamps them as classical, without leaving ground for doubt'. The accompanying footnote continues:

there stood between [the heads] a Gothic inscription, and the whole produced the impression as if the heads and the inscription had been together preserved from among the stones of some ruined ecclesiastical edifice. If this be so, the classic heathen sculpture with which the Gothic architect decorated his building had been piously preserved, when all that symbolised the Christian rites for which the building was raised had been lost or destroyed.⁵⁸

The presumption was that the portrait heads were joined by the inscription; that both had decorated a lost religious house; that the whole had been extracted from the ruin thereof; and that the entire composition was then transferred to its Netherbow site, carrying with it the sanctity of both pagan Rome and medieval Scottish Christendom.

The first serious doubt of their Roman provenance appears in 1885. Daniel Wilson's article in *PSAS* betrays the author's scepticism in its very title: 'The So-called Roman Heads of the Nether Bow'. Despite Wilson's nostalgic memories of seeing the heads over three decades before at the Netherbow, and his description of

them as 'having for so long figured among the lions of the old capital', he ultimately (and rather reluctantly) concluded that they were probably of Renaissance origin.⁵⁹ Rather than being Roman, he suggested that the sculpture may have originated from the nearby mansion of the Abbots of Melrose or the neighbouring Chapel and Convent of St Mary. Moreover, the Gothic inscription with its text from the Vulgate might actually be *older* than the portrait heads!⁶⁰

Although pleased that the sculptures were now preserved in the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities, Wilson felt that this change of location had resulted in a loss to their unique character. 'Transferred from the site that they so long occupied in the Nether Bow to a place in the Antiquarian Museum, they present a contrast somewhat akin to that of a wild flower on its native hill-side, and the same when reduced to a withered mummy in a botanist's herbarium.' Indeed, a prime purpose of Wilson's paper was to suggest that the heads be reinstated in the Netherbow: he proposed a location on a recently constructed building there, with the purpose also of marking the site of the house of the printer Thomas Bassendyne, by the addition of a plaque commemorating his famous edition of the Bible of 1576.⁶¹ That would have tied in neatly with the biblical reference in the 'Adam and Eve' stone.

But was Wilson in fact entirely convinced by his own argument? In 1891 a second, authorised edition of his *Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time* was issued, which had originally appeared in 1848.⁶² The second edition in fact shows little change of view from that expressed in the first. Wilson credits David Laing with having shown that the final symbols on the inscription were not indicative of a date but rather represented a biblical reference. But Sir John Clerk had actually pointed this out in 1726. However, what Wilson goes on to say is significant: that the tablet bearing the inscription was 'no doubt the work of a very different period' from that of the heads themselves. It had been 'brought into association with valuable relics of a remoter era'. And these were 'valuable monuments of the Roman invasion' of which the old tenement had been 'the conservator'.

Wilson then wanders off, metaphorically, on a search for Bassendyne's house.⁶³ We are left not quite knowing how we stand. The Roman idea was most certainly still alive. For one reason or another, Scottish antiquaries appeared reluctant to abandon this link with the classical past of their country.

Wilson's 1891 *Memorials* appears like some intellectual fossil, sealed into a stratum now otherwise worked-out. After all, but half a dozen years previously, he had himself opted for the non-Roman origin of the heads. By 1892, the curators of the National Museum of Antiquities seemed to accept Wilson's earlier re-attribution, and the institution's catalogue of that year placed it amongst the medieval and Renaissance 'Ecclesiastical' sculptures in the collections.⁶⁴ We do not know how (or even if) the sculpture was exhibited in early incarnations of the Museum's displays, but stripped of its Roman provenance and removed from its original location, the sculpture all but disappears from the written record, evidence perhaps of a relative lack of interest in Scotland's Renaissance art and artefacts among scholars and public alike. Today the relief is displayed in the 'Kingdom of the Scots' gallery of the National Museum of Scotland. It is labelled as a 16th-century 'Renaissance-style' representation of Adam and Eve which once decorated what was the house of the baxters' (or bakers') guild (although this notion of a link with bakers seems to derive solely from the often fanciful Maitland). There is no mention of its erstwhile, specious identification as Roman, nor of its long sojourn in the antiquarian imagination as something it evidently was not. Positioned where it now is, one can see clearly (a) that the three stones appear, visually, to be geologically of the same character (at any rate as far as this can be determined in the absence of petrological analysis by the Museum); (b) that they form a single, united composition; (c) that the mouldings which surround the profile portraits and the inscription lying between them are continuous, and integral with the individual stones; and (d) that the three carved sections are thus contemporaneous and constitute a single sculptural work.

On the last occasion (90 years ago) when the sculptures were discussed, a note of confusion

mixed with lingering uncertainty remained evident. John Geddie explained that the relief had long been 'the subject of controversy as to its original site, as well as its date, meaning and history'. Though he declared that the Roman theory had been 'questioned and indeed exploded', he himself did not actually give an opinion; and he maintained (incorrectly) that William Maitland had thought that the heads represented Adam and Eve, whereas Maitland had unequivocally said that they were ancient Roman.⁶⁵ Although a detailed analysis of the sculpture's true provenance, iconography and stylistic influences lies outwith the scope of this paper, such further research is surely merited.

Sir John Clerk's belief in the classical provenance of the heads was unfounded and these sculptures can be added to the list of antiquities that he misattributed to the Romans in his attempts, subconscious or otherwise, to enhance Scotland's claim to a classical heritage. In doing so, he helped to inspire a persistent, although very probably mistaken, belief that Edinburgh itself was established on Roman foundations. Alexander Gordon was equally insistent, from different motives, that the stones were Roman and that they could thus be seen as talismans of Caledonian resistance to an invading power whom they 'sent homeward ... to think again'.

Sir James Dalrymple of Hailes, second baronet, may have sought to evoke the spirit, if not the letter, of the Netherbow heads when he incorporated what may perhaps be – the matter is by no means certain – very free translations of the profile portraits in the pediment of his new door-case on the south front of Newhailes when the house was reconfigured in the 1730s (Illus 11). Clearly the over-door profile heads at Newhailes differ in many ways from the High Street 'originals', and may not even be related or inspired by them at all, despite current thinking that they are.⁶⁶ Their positions are reversed, and the physiognomy and drapery are quite different; and they have no visible hands, which are such distinctive elements in the original composition. The Newhailes profiles are positioned above an architrave bearing the inscription *laudo manentem*. The words are



ILLUS 11 Profile heads in the pediment over the south door to Newhailes House, Musselburgh. Photograph Mark McLean

taken from Horace, *Odes* III, xxix 53. The poet has been writing of how fickle Fortune changes her mind and her rewards, first favouring the one and then the other: 'I praise her while she stays.' Enjoy Fortune's favour while you can, Horace proposes; when she flies away, wrap yourself in your own virtue and make the best of things. While men needed the message of the Netherbow heads, they used them as they saw fit. They have been icons for their times. To quote the Horatian tag carved over the north door of Newhailes, '*sapienter uti*' (*Odes* IV, ix 48): the happy man uses wisely whatever he has been given to work with.

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conversation over the years on the general subject of Scottish 18th-century antiquarianism with Professor Lawrence Keppie. Professor Catharine Edwards has provided invaluable expertise on the early modern reception of the Roman world.

NOTES

- 1 On Clerk as an antiquary see Brown 1977: 201–9; and Brown 1980b, *passim*.
- 2 On Gordon and his authorship of *Itinerarium Septentrionale* see most recently Brown 2012: 510–27.
- 3 See, for example, Brown 1980a: chapter 5; and Brown 1987b: 33–49.
- 4 NRS, GD18/5029. This is an un-paginated letter-book.
- 5 NRS, GD18/5029.
- 6 See Scott 2003, particularly pp 39–49.
- 7 NLS, MS 1251, f1, Clerk to John Mackenzie of Delvine, 2 October 1723.
- 8 Clerk refers to the antiquarian scholarship of the German Johann Georg Graeve (Johannes Georgius Graevius) of Utrecht (1632–1703), whose *Thesaurus Antiquitatum Romanorum* and *Thesaurus Antiquitatum et Historiarum Italiae* were magisterial multi-volume works of reference; and to that of Bernard de Montfaucon (1655–1741), the Benedictine monk who wrote an important work on his Italian travels which included a comprehensive account of the topography of Rome (greatly praised by Clerk) and the celebrated *L'Antiquité Expliquée et Représentée en Figures* (in 10 volumes, with a later five volume supplement. Clerk owned the English translations of the original work and its supplement). (NLS, MS Dep 187, Penicuik Library Catalogue.) Clerk assessed Montfaucon as 'a man of great learning' (NRS, GD18/5078/36) and made frequent, but by no means always uncritical, references to his text and illustrations.
- 9 NRS, GD18/5111; and Maggi 2008: 62–3.
- 10 NLS, Adv MS 23.3.26. f21, Clerk to Patrick Lindsay, 4 April 1739; see also NRS, GD18/5023/3/86, Alexander Gordon to Clerk, 17 April 1739.
- 11 The original of Clerk's letter cannot be identified in the Pembroke family archives at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham. The likelihood is that the Earl passed it immediately to Gordon, and that it and the Alexander drawing subsequently disappeared in the vicissitudes of Gordon's somewhat unsettled life in London and thereafter in America.
- 12 On the Society of Roman Knights see Brown 1980b: 34–5; Brown 1987a: 111–28; and Ayres 1997: 91–105 and 195–6.
- 13 Gordon 1726: 186. Gordon refers to the epitome of Cassius Dio's *Roman History* made by the 11th-century Byzantine monk Ioannes Xipelinus.
- 14 See Brown 2011: 68.
- 15 On this episode see Millar 1964: 149; and Levick 2007: 70–1, 85. The passage is Dio, 77. 16.
- 16 Brown 2011: 68. The volume is now NLS, Acc 12965.
- 17 For a discussion of the Queensberry monument see Friedman 1987; also Pearson 1991: 29–30 and figs 30–1.
- 18 Clerk to Gale, 5 March 1742, in Nichols 1790: 348.
- 19 NRS, GD18/5038/1, Horsley to Clerk, 16 September 1729.
- 20 NLS, MS 1281, f114, Gordon to John Mackenzie, 13 March 1725.
- 21 NRS, GD18/5030/88, Gale to Clerk, 20 December 1742.
- 22 Maitland 1753: 169–70.
- 23 Pennant 1771: 46–50 and note, p 50.
- 24 Laing 1831: 287–9 and plate opposite p 287. In the album of miscellaneous prints assembled by Lord Buchan and presented by him to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1783 (now in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery) are two copies of the Allan aquatint (sheet 74), one in sepia (like the print eventually published by the Antiquaries in 1831) and one in black and white. Both bear engraved captions identifying the portrait heads.
- 25 *The Bee*, XIII, 20 February 1793: 294.
- 26 Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Minutes, 1780–4: 305 (4 March 1783), with marginal reference to Donation no. 435. The casts cannot now be traced among the Society's former collections.
- 27 *Ibid*: 172.
- 28 Communications to the Society [of Antiquaries of Scotland], I (1780–4), f154.
- 29 Arnot 1788: 240–1.
- 30 Campbell 1802: 131.
- 31 Camden 1806: 50.
- 32 Carr 1809: 53.

- 33 Walker 1831: 296. The begetter of the mould must have been Henry, third Duke of Buccleuch (d 1812), who was the first President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Walker may, in fact, be referring to the casts procured and presented by William Thornton of Tortola, mentioned above.
- 34 See Wainwright 1988: 29 and 142, no. 68A.
- 35 Grierson 1932, IV: 290 Scott to Daniel Terry, 12 December 1816; also *ibid* V: 136 Scott to Terry, 4 May 1818.
- 36 Grierson 1932, V: 133, Scott to Daniel Terry, 30 April 1818. Scott told Terry, with reference specifically to the ceiling decoration of the dining room at Abbotsford, that he had ‘got I know not how many casts’.
- 37 Stark 1806: 104–5.
- 38 *The New Picture of Edinburgh* 1806: 42. The heads continue to appear in subsequent editions of this work under its revised titles in 1817 (p 37) and 1820 (p 32).
- 39 This work is un-paginated. See ‘Edinburghshire or Midlothian’ second page, *sv* ‘Roman stone on the front of a house in the Netherbow’.
- 40 Williams 1820: 298.
- 41 Chambers 1825: 128–9.
- 42 Laing 1831: 287–9.
- 43 National Museum of Scotland Library, Archer Drawings, sheet 93.
- 44 Willox *c* 1845: 68. Andrew Fraser has dated this guidebook to about 1845 – and no earlier – on the basis of internal evidence.
- 45 Rhind 1847: 28.
- 46 *Menzies’ Tourist’s Pocket Guide for Scotland* 1852: 139.
- 47 The first edition of McDowall’s guide had confined itself to simple mention of ‘two antique Roman busts’, with no element of scepticism and no Biblical exegesis (*McDowall’s New Guide in Edinburgh* 1836: 37–8).
- 48 Wilson 1851: 379 and 387.
- 49 Stuart 1852: 164n and 165n.
- 50 For example Wilson 1860: 114–15 and *Menzies’ Pocket Guide to Edinburgh and its Environs* 1867: 39.
- 51 Brydone 1856: 36.
- 52 Wilson 1856: 8 and 58.
- 53 Anderson 1856: 4; Daniel Wilson is cited as the source of this conjecture.
- 54 Rhind 1860: 23.
- 55 Hill Burton 1867: 49–50. Hill Burton says that they could be seen ‘until very recently’ in the High Street, and that ‘they have an air that at once stamps them as classical, without leaving ground for doubt’.
- 56 Mackenzie 1867: 32. The title page of the National Library of Scotland copy of the reprint of 1902 bears manuscript evidence of posterity’s view of Mackenzie as historian. A reader has altered ‘*The History ...*’ to read ‘*A Very Unreliable History ...*’.
- 57 Grant 1885: 10.
- 58 Hill Burton 1873: 50.
- 59 Wilson 1885: 203–4 and 208.
- 60 *Ibid*: 208.
- 61 *Ibid*: 208–9. Wilson alluded to the Bassendyne printing of the New Testament (‘Geneva’ version) in Edinburgh in 1576. The Old Testament would follow in 1579.
- 62 Wilson had dealt with the heads in the first edition of *Memorials* in the 1848 second volume, pp 50–1.
- 63 Wilson 1891: 67–8.
- 64 *Catalogue of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland* 1892: 291.
- 65 Geddie 1927: 110 and 112, with fig on p 111.
- 66 Horrocks 2004: 16. The Newhailes Library contained a copy of Gordon’s *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, now in the National Library of Scotland, along with the rest of the Newhailes books. The copy (Nha.Misc.63) has been disbound and shorn of all but two of its plates. It would have been pleasing to find some annotation present indicating that Gordon’s description and image of the Netherbow heads had inspired Dalrymple’s imitation or adaptation; regrettably, it contains no such pointers.

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