

ROMAN SEPULCHRE DISCOVERED AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE RECENTLY DISCOVERED ROMAN SEPULCHRE AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

BY WILLIAM HENRY BLACK, ESQ. F.S.A.

[Read at an Evening Meeting of the Society, 10 January, 1870.]

When the Dean of Westminster communicated to the Society of Antiquaries on the 9th December, 1869, the then very recent discovery of a Roman interment within an inscribed stone coffin, in the "North Green" of the abbey, lying east and west, between the north side of the nave of the abbey and the fence which separates it from the parochial churchyard of St. Margaret's; although I then perceived the importance of this discovery in respect of the history of that locality, yet I reserved the observations which then occurred to me until I should have visited the ground and seen the coffin itself.

Accordingly I went thither the next day, and inspected the coffin in the cloister; but could not obtain access to the exact spot where it had been found. On Monday the 13th I was more successful, having obtained an interview with the Dean; and I carefully examined those parts of the ground which then lay open. In the meantime I had marked the spot (as shown in a sketch-plan exhibited by the Dean) on one of the best maps of London which I possess, that published by Cross in 1842, and I had obtained a remarkable series of ancient lines and measures from it.

I have repeatedly pointed out to this Society and elsewhere the fact, of which no practical use had been made by antiquaries before I recovered the measures and methods of the Roman surveyors, that, by a law of the Emperor Tiberius,* they were authorised to use *sepulchres* for purposes of boundary, and for points and intersections of geometric lines. I had already shown that the sculptured and inscribed marble sarcophagus or sepulchral monument, found in September 1867 at Clapton,† had served as a geometric point from which numerous

* *Rei Agrarie Auctores, Legesque variae.* (Amst. 1674, 4to.) pp. 346-8.

† See the Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society,

measures extended to boundary points of Hackney and its neighbouring townships. I thought, therefore, that this newly-found coffin, in like manner bearing a classic inscription at the side or in front, might have served for a similar purpose; and so I have found it.

Without entering upon a discussion of the veracity of the measures to which I have often referred in this Society or elsewhere, and without specifying the ancient denomination of the measure or quantity of those lines and spaces which I shall now describe, suffice it to say that the latter is neither an itinerary measure of the Romans, nor any one of the large or small measures used in originally surveying or mapping a country, but it is one rarely used in Britain, and here used only for supplementary surveys. Its proper denomination is perfectly well known to me, but has no identity with any measures that I have heretofore quoted. It stands on its own merits; and there is no necessity to stir up controversy by giving a name to it, beyond treating it as an algebraical quantity denoted by the letter x . The magnitude or linear quantity of this measure is enough for the present purpose, and is obtained by drawing equal lines to two Roman monuments, the positions of which are clearly ascertainable.

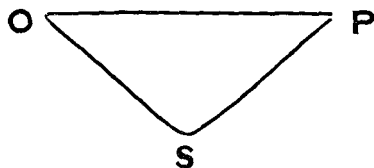
Of these two monuments the first is *Ossulstone*, from which the great hundred, wherein the metropolis is locally situate, derives its name. Its position and identity I had discovered some years ago by reversing my method of determining the uses of geometric stones: that is, by finding, from the proper boundary points, a centre where lines of proper quantities unite, so as to make them serve as *radii* from such centre to the said boundary points. I find this method infallible, and often trace out the positions of obscure or lost monuments by geometric figures. I examine the spot indicated by this method, and there I find the monument or some certain trace of it. *Ossulstone* is figured in Sir John Roque's great map of 1741-1761, sheet xi. in the very spot to which my process on other maps had led me; and it is there called the "Stone where soldiers are shot," situate near the north-east angle of Hyde Park. It was afterward covered with an accumulation of soil, and is now dug up and lies against the Marble Arch, as stated in my petition, presented last session to the House of Commons, for the protection of ancient uninscribed stones,

vol. iii. pp. 191-212, for an account of it, illustrated by engravings and a plan of the locality. My own papers and plans relative to that subject have not been printed.

mounds, and other landmarks;—monuments of more value and importance to historical science than mediæval tombs and sculptured effigies, which are already in official custody, and infinitely more in need of public conservation than ornamental works of art can be.

The second equal line leads to the well-known sculptured stone, undoubtedly of Roman work, formerly uninscribed, but now bearing an English inscription below the sculpture, dated “1685,” which stone forms part of the front wall of a house on the eastern side of Panyer Alley, between Newgate Street and Paternoster Row. I had already found and publicly mentioned that this stone had geometric uses, both within and without the City, and had mentioned to Parliament its temporary disappearance and restoration. Now I find that this stone is equally distant from the newly-discovered Sepulchre as that is from Ossulstone.

Although there is a triangle formed by lines between these points, of which the Sepulchre toward the south I shall call “S,” Ossulstone toward the north-west I shall call “O,” and the stone in Panyer Alley I shall call “P;” yet the base-line from “O” to “P” is here



disregarded, not being constituted by multiples or parts of the quantity x , and there being no necessity, arising from the practice of the Roman engineers, that it should be so

constituted. They chiefly employed radiating lines, forming curves more or less parts of a circle, and sometimes in every direction, so as to make a whole circle. In this instance the radiating lines, except that from “S” to “O,” all tend to constitute a large arc in an eastward direction, toward the boundaries of London and Southwark, of which arc “S” is the centre.

Thus the same quantity x is found in a line drawn from “S” to an angle of the territory or liberty of London, on the Fleet River, situate north-west of Smithfield; and the same quantity x is found in a line drawn thence to “A,” the boundary of Whitechapel and Aldgate, south of Rosemary Lane; whence another line leads to the Lord Mayor’s stone, “N,” at the ancient watercourse bounding the borough of Southwark and the parish of Newington, near the Elephant and Castle.

The next line x that I shall notice, drawn from “S,” leads to “D,”

at the mouth of Dowgate Dock, or the Wall-brook. Then the curve from "O" to "P" and "D," passing over the Thames, reaches the mouth of a corresponding Roman dock, "M," on the southern side of the river, properly named St. Mary Overy's Dock, but called in the map "St. Saviour's Dock." It next proceeds to a boundary point "H," in High Street, Southwark, and so on to the western extremity of Bermondsey parish, where a *trifinium* of three parishes or townships occurs, which I shall call "B." Each of those lines radiating from "S" is of equal length to the others, being the quantity designated x .

If the line "S" to "D" be directly prolonged by a further equal quantity, it reaches "W," the Whitechapel stone, situate at the corner of a street (called Cannon Row) between the London Hospital and Mile End, at the *trifinium* of three of the Tower Hamlets, whence extend various and long measures of different quantities throughout the county of Middlesex, and also into Kent, Surrey, and Essex. This prolonged line or radius therefore, from "S" to "W," is equal to $2x$. A similar long line is the last that I shall describe as leading directly from our first point, the Sepulchre, namely (*per radium* $2x$) to "R," the *trifinium* of the great parishes or townships of Rotherhithe and Camberwell, and the manor of Hatcham; from which point runs another line x , to "C," the *confinium* of two Tower Hamlets crossing the Roman military way called Cable Street, 150 yards from the spot where I write this paper. Thence back again, across the river, passes another line x , to "RR," the *trifinium* of the said parish of Rotherhithe and of the manors of Hatcham and Deptford, in Surrey. Thence also (from "C") passes another line x , to "F," the mouth of the river Fleet, where it touches the line "S" to "P," second already described. From "F" another line x reaches a *trifinium* of three Tower Hamlets, at the north end of Back-church Lane, whence I had previously found measures of other known distances to many other boundary points. Two or more lines, also, of the same quantity x , pass from "W" to other boundary points, one of which terminates on the river Ravensbourne, and one other line x reaches from Cable Street to "T," the extreme south boundary of Southwark, near St. Thomas-a-Watering, at the *trifinium* of Newington, Camberwell, and St. George's Southwark. Thence a long line of $2x$ reaches back to a Westminster boundary at Hyde Park Corner.

Returning again to the line "S" to "P," I find a line x running southward from the stone "P" to "NL," the *confinium* of Newington

and Lambeth, at the corner of Kennington Lane. Hence a like line x reaches (in a south-westerly direction) to "L B," the west angle of Lambeth, which boldly projects into Battersea parish at the locality now called "South Ville." Thence a like line, drawn almost northward, reaches to "Q," an ancient boundary-point of Westminster at the west end of Birdcage Walk. Thence another like line x reaches to "X," a projecting boundary-point between Marylebone and Pancras parishes, near Park Square, in the New Road. Thence the same quantity (x) brings us in a south-east direction to the Thames, at the precise boundary-point "LW," between the liberties of London and Westminster.

From this last-mentioned point I gain, by the same remarkable measure x , the true diagonal quantity of the territory or liberty of London: viz. (1) from its south-west angle at "LW," to "Z," its extreme east angle in Portsoken Ward, behind and between Somerset Street and Great Alie Street, where, in making the perambulation of Whitechapel parish, the boundary-plate is touched in a wall behind the late Presbyterian Meeting-house now called "Zoar Chapel." The same diagonal x is found by measuring (2) from Holborn Bars to the *trifinium* on Little Tower Hill, where the City boundary meets the liberties of Tower Without and Aldgate Without; also (3) from the extreme north-west angle of the City liberty in Gray's Inn Lane, to the City boundary on the north (not the south) side of Swan Street, Whitechapel; and also (4) from Temple Bar to Aldgate Bars, at the north-east corner of Somerset Street, Whitechapel. All these are diagonal lines of the territory of the Roman *Londinium*.

I could greatly extend this survey with the same radius x , and its constituent parts and multiples, but I have shown enough to demonstrate three things: (1) the certainty, value, and usefulness of the quantity derived from the relation between the Roman Sepulchre at Westminster and other ancient monuments; (2) the great antiquity of the townships, manors, parishes, and districts marked out by this elaborate and exact system of limitation, of which some few elements only are now exhibited out of the measures of x described in my MS. "Explorations," and out of thousands demonstrable by the ordinary measures consisting of Roman miles and stadia; and (3) the true geometric character of the spot chosen for the position of the newly-discovered sepulchre.

Let me now treat of the sepulchre itself. It was found in a dry sandy soil,* altogether different from what has been hitherto represented or supposed to be the nature of Thorney Island, the site of Westminster Abbey, and from the bog-earth which was lately dug out of the ground southward of St. Margaret's Church in making a subterranean railway. The boldly and deeply-cut inscription of this coffin remarkably contrasts with the delicate and almost obliterated inscription of the more elegant coffin found at Clapton, and now preserved at Guildhall. Both contained bones when found, but both had been disturbed and rifled long ago. Both were inscribed at the side or in front, as if for public view; and the Clapton sarcophagus bears an elegant medallion likeness of its occupant, which it is unreasonable to suppose should have been intended to be hidden under the ground. The original covers of both have disappeared: for the Westminster slab, bearing a fantastic cross of the twelfth or thirteenth century, rudely cut in relief, cannot be the original top of the sepulchre. The ornamentation of the Clapton monument covers its whole side or front: that at Westminster occupies only the extremities of the side or front, and seems to consist of two *pelta*, or perhaps the halves of a dimidiated shield, the curved edges being turned inwardly, toward the panel which contains the inscription, and the lines of division being placed at the utmost distance asunder. If so, each part has one-half of the pattern or bearing, the *insignia* of the shield; and the shield itself would be of the same round shape as all those figured in that most important Roman record, the *Notitia Dignitatum Utriusque Imperii*.

Together these *insignia* would constitute four pairs of bosses or circles, placed so that two of the pairs form, together with a central lozenge, a kind of *quatrefoil*; and the upper and lower pairs, situate against the edge of the shield, have lateral curves connecting them with the central group. No such shield is represented in the *Notitia*;† but there

* Some of the sand is now produced, which I took from the spot upon which the stone coffin had rested, about four feet below the recent surface.

† Neither in the first complete and illustrated edition, Basil, 1552, fol.; nor in Pancirol's Venetian edition, 1602, fol.; nor in the stupid German edition of Bocking, Bonn, 1839-53, 3 vols. 8vo. All these are in my possession, besides the unillustrated edition of Labbé, Paris, 1651, 12mo. quoted below. The plates in the Dutch edition, published in Grævii Thesaurus, are too ornamentally and fantastically engraved. The first edition is the best and most intelligible of all.

are four shields bearing each a single *pelta*.* Nor can I certainly determine its meaning from the inscription, which says, "Memoriæ Valer. Amandini, Valerii Superventor et Marcellus Patri fecerunt:" that is, "To the memory of Valerius Amandinus, Valerius *Superventor* and [Valerius] Marcellus to [their] father made" it. Here all three are named "Valerii," but the elder son is surnamed *Superventor*. This *cognomen* is a military term, not only used by Ammianus Marcellinus once, (as quoted by some of those gentlemen who spoke when the discovery of this monument was first made known,) but also repeatedly occurring in the *Notitia*. By this record it appears that, in the fourth century, some of the "auxiliaries," or regiments distinct from Roman legions, were stationed at Axiupolis "under the disposition of the respectable man, the Duke of Scythia," by the title of *Milites Superventores*.† Also, "under the disposition of the illustrious man, the Præsental Master of the Infantry," (subject to whom were the *Comes Limitis* and the *Dux Limitis* in Britain,) were constituted eighteen regiments of "Pseudo - Comitatuses," including those called "Superventores Juniores."‡ Also, "within Gaul, with the illustrious man, the Master of the Cavalry of Gaul," are specified "Superventores Juniores."§ Lastly, "under the disposition of the respectable man, the Duke of the Armorican and Nervican Tract," was stationed an officer entitled "Prefect of the *Milites Superventores*, at Mannatia."||

In the second of these four instances, the *insignia* of the "Superventores" are pictured in the Record. The form of their shield was round, with a simple circle or boss in the centre. How this is coloured in the illuminated MS. which I have used and collated at Paris, I cannot remember; but Pancirolus, in his Commentary,¶ describes the "shield red, with a golden orb in the middle." He adds that, in one MS. the shield was green, and bore a purple ball in the middle. It appears, however, that the only "Superventores," whose shield is exhibited in the Imperial Record, were the *Juniores*; and they must (as in all other instances) have borne a difference to distinguish them from the *Seniores*, who are twice mentioned without their distinctive

* Namely, those of the following legions stationed in the Eastern Empire:—*Prima Flavia Theodosiana, Secunda Felix Valen. Thebaeorum, Prima and Secunda Armeniaca.* (Edit. 1602, f. 33.)

† Ed. 1651, p. 46.

‡ Ib. p. 69.

|| Ib. p. 114.

§ Ib. p. 75.

¶ Venet. 1602, f. 126^b, 132^b.

name of seniors. To these, I conceive, the *Valerii* belonged who erected this monument, and their father also, who was interred in it; at least the one surnamed "Superventor." Hence, I submit whether the *pelta* sculptured on this tomb were bearings proper to the "Milites Superventores," or "Senior Overcomers." If so, this is one of the most ancient examples of heraldry in Britain.

The importance of this sepulchral monument, in respect to the topography of Westminster, cannot be too highly estimated, since here is clear proof of its Roman occupation, which was alleged by the monkish historians, but is discredited by modern antiquaries. Whether or not there ever were a temple of Apollo, on the site of the abbey, is a matter of comparatively small importance; but that Roman domestic edifices were there, appears plain to me from the ruined substructures disclosed by the learned and zealous Dean. Among those ruins, consisting of squared chalk and stone rubble, I found lumps of mortar, containing finely-powdered brick, which all those antiquaries, who have fractured and examined the lumps now exhibited, agree with me in believing to be Roman.

I conclude by saying, that, when those foundations shall have been thoroughly explored, and the precise position of the Toot-hill, formerly in or near Tot-hill Fields, Westminster, shall have been ascertained, and treated as the other geometric mounds are capable of being treated, the earliest history of Westminster may be written, with greater probability than it could be under the uncertain influence of traditions and legends handed down by the monks of Westminster, whom our public records prove to have been in some respects untrustworthy. Nevertheless, there was some truth in their tradition of Roman occupation, whether or not by a temple. At all events, it now appears to be not improbable that this Roman interment, while its inscription was above ground and visible, being made without the usual dedication to the *Dii Manes*, may have been deemed a Christian sepulture (as possibly it was), and so may have given rise to a belief in the sanctity of the spot, as a place proper for the erection of a church or monastery early in the seventh century.

W. H. BLACK, F.S.A.

Mill Yard, Goodman's Fields,
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POSTSCRIPT.

The following are the authorities from the *Notitia* at length, extracted from the edition of 1602 :—

1. “Sub dispositione viri spectabilis, Ducis Scythiæ. . . . Auxiliares *Milites Superventores Axiupoli.*” (f. 100^b.)

2. “Sub dispositione viri illustris Magistri Peditum Præsentalis, Comites Militum [leg. *Limitum*] infrascriptorum. Italiæ. Africa. Tingitanæ. Tractus Argenteratensis. Britanniarum. Littoris Saxonici per Britannias. Duces Limitum infrascriptorum decem. . . . Britanniarum. . . . Legiones Comitatus triginta duæ. . . . Pseudo-comitatus decem et octo. . . . *Superventores Juniores.*” (f. 126^b, 127.)

3. “Sub dispositione viri illustris Comitatus et Magistri Equitum Præsentalis. Vexillationes Palatinæ ix. . . . Vexillationes Comitatus xxxii. . . . Qui numeri ex prædictis, per infrascriptas provincias habentur. Intra Italiam. . . . Intra Gallias cum viro illustri Magistro Equitum Galliarum. . . . *Superventores Juniores.*” (f. 133^b, 135^b, 136.)

4. “Sub dispositione viri spectabilis Ducis Tractus Armorici et Nervicani. . . . Præfectus *Militum Superventorum Mannatias.*” (f. 174^b.)

Compare sections 28, 38, 40, and 61, as the text is divided in the Edition of 1651.
