

II.

NOTE ON FOUR SMALL FLASKS OF TERRA COTTA, BEARING REPRESENTATIONS OF ST MENAS, FROM ALEXANDRIA, NOW IN THE MUSEUM. BY JOSEPH ANDERSON, KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

The object of this short note is to give a name, character, and date to four little flasks of terra cotta in the Museum, which have been hitherto without these desirable attributes, and therefore incapable of being classified or utilised for any scientific purpose. It is some time since my attention was attracted to them by the suggestive resemblance of the figures modelled on their flat sides to the representations of the Prophet Daniel with the conventional two lions, and as I had no doubt they were Christian in character and early in date, I figured one of them as a tail-piece to my paper on the representations of Daniel and Jonah, in the hope that some information regarding them might be obtained by that means. I did not then know what they were, nor who the personage was that was figured upon them, and luckily I was unable to persuade myself that any amount of degradation could transform the noble proportions of the king of beasts into the lizard-like objects upon them, or I might have claimed them as representing Daniel. Even had I done so I should have been excusable seeing that such a high authority on Christian antiquities as De Rossi himself had fallen into this mistake.

Nothing ruder, as you will see, could well be imagined—not even the Lewis cow exhibited by Dr Mitchell at the Rhind Lectures. Whatever the beasts may be thought to resemble, it is clear that we should never have guessed that they were intended for camels, if there had been no other source of information than the vases themselves.

The only other representation of St Menas that I have seen occurs on an ivory pyx of the 6th century, described by Padre Garucci, the learned author of the magnificent work "*Storia della Arte Cristiana*," now passing through the press. This pyx, says Garucci, is the only one out of fifteen which are known to me that is sculptured with subjects not relating to the Eucharist. On five of these fifteen the incarnation is represented, on other five the miracles of Christ, and specially the raising of Lazarus, appear. Three more may be readily referred to the

same order of ideas, two of them showing the history of Jonah, and one the three Hebrews in the furnace, both well-known types of the resurrection. The fourteenth represents the sacrifice of Isaac, also a symbol of the Eucharist, and the fifteenth, as I have said, is the only one on which a subject is represented which can in no way be referred to the Eucharist, and which on the contrary evidently concerns the worship of a very celebrated holy martyr, that is to say, St Menas (or Menna) of Egypt. It seems to me, therefore, clearly shown that this pyx affords the first actual proof of the employment once made of such pyxes---viz., of placing in them sacred relics.



Terra Cotta Vase from Alexandria, with representation of St Menas and the Camels.

Father Garruci goes on to say that no one who considers how solemn the devotion to the holy martyr Menas was throughout the whole Church would be surprised that a reliquary destined to preserve a relic of him had been met with in Rome, where a church dedicated in his honour existed, in which St Gregory the Great recited the thirty-fifth of his homilies.

The pyx has two bas-reliefs, one of which represents the martyrdom of St Menas, the other his Sanctuary. It is with the latter alone that I am concerned. It represents an *ædicula* or sanctuary on the threshold of which the martyr appears glorified with a nimbus, and with outspread arms, the attitude of prayer in early times, and the conventional mode of

representing the glorified saints. He wears the tunic and chlamys fastened on the right shoulder. On each side of the saint a camel appears kneeling, and several human figures disposed in the distance represent the pilgrims approaching the shrine.

The famous sanctuary of St Menas was situated to the west of Alexandria, on the reputed birthplace of the saint, and by its side stood the paternal cottage, which was preserved as a bulwark of defence to all Lybia, as Sophronius tells. The writer of the "Acts of St Menas" states that this saint was always represented in company with two camels, and the reason is thus narrated:—Before his martyrdom the saint had ordered his disciples that after his death his body should be placed on camels, when the glory of God would be manifested. The legend is, that when this was done the camels were guided as were the oxen who drew the ark to the spot where God willed that the sanctuary should be erected, and therefore St Menas is never represented without this evident sign of the providence of God.

The beasts, however, are often so rudely represented that it is difficult to recognise them as camels. In fact, De Rossi, as father Garucci tells, when commenting on one of these earthen flasks, bearing the effigy of the saint, "first thought them two lions,¹ and afterwards declared them to be two lambs²—really a miraculous change." We may, however, excuse this mistake, since he took the personage represented on the flask in the act of prayer for Daniel, and therefore paid little attention to the misshapen beasts; which are usually roughly modelled on the flasks. But when the flask in the Museum of Florence turned up on which the name of St Menas is legible, the subject of the representation was ascertained beyond a doubt.

Another ivory is preserved in the Brera at Milan, on which the saint is similarly represented with outspread arms and a camel crouching at either side.

A flask found at Arles³ in France bears on the one side St Menas with two camels, and on the other, within a wreath, the words, ΕΥΑΘΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΜΗΝΑ.

There are 12 of these flasks in the British Museum, of which 4 bear

¹ Bull. Arch. Crist. 1869, pp. 31, 32.

² Bull. Arch. Crist. 1869, p. 46.

³ Ibid. p. 20.

the name of St Menas, and all have on one side the figure with outspread arms and the two camels. Two of them resemble the one I have figured, and two are similar to the two in the Museum, having both sides alike, St Menas standing between the camels within a circle of dots.